HERMIONE

AND

ORPHAN SISTERS.

HERMIONE:

OR, THE

ORPHAN SISTERS.

A NOVEL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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HERMIONE.

LETTER XIII.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

FEB. 20.

I COULD not contrive to meet with Mr. Howard till dinner was announced, at which he ſeemed abſent and abſorbed; but as I then ſat next him, I aſked him to allow me to talk with him when we left the table.

It is juſt the requeſt I was going to make, ſaid he: and when the ladies retired to tea and coffee, under pretence of buſineſs he made his excuſes to the gentlemen and joined me in Mrs. Hindon's dreſſing room.

No time is to be loſt, dear Sir, ſaid I to him the moment he entered, in changing our abode. The ſooner the alteration in our circumſtances takes place, the ſooner ſhall we be enabled to conquer that reluctance which it muſt at firſt occaſion. We have been unwillingly conſtrained, from a cruel peculiarity in our fate, to prove a burthen on the humanity of our friends too long. I will not wound your delicacy by touching on the unſpeakable obligations under which you have laid us, and for which ſimple gratitude is I fear all the return that will

ever be allowed us to teſtify; that however you may be aſſured is warm from our hearts, and never can be effaced from our remembrance: but your ſiſter, Mrs. Hindon, we have incommoded greatly too long. I have been conſidering many different plans, continued I; but as a ſtrict economy muſt be the baſis of all our ſchemes, and that is in fact an art I have yet to learn, it is not eaſy to fix; neither, from my ſhort reſidence in this country, am I an adequate judge of the ſafety or propriety of any ſtep, without aſking the advice and aſſiſtance of that friend whom Fate has left us. Do you imagine however, without being too laviſh of your trouble, that a reputable family might be found who would conſent immediately to receive us for a moderate ſum, till that mode of life can be clearly aſcertained of which our finances will hereafter allow?

Perhaps there might, ſaid he. But ſurely, Miſs Seymour, you do not think of removing immediately.

You do not ſeem to approve of this ſcheme, cried I, finding he ſaid nothing more and ſeemed buried in thought. Is there any other you would adviſe?

Ah, Miſs Seymour! cried he at laſt; there is a ſcheme—but I tremble to mention it.

At theſe words his face was overſpread with a confuſion which covered mine with bluſhes. The ſerioufneſs of his manner, the embarraſſment that had ſeized him, and an unuſual expreſſion of ſoftneſs in his countenance, altogether infuſed ſuſpicions into my mind of the moſt diſtreſſing nature: but Mr. Howard inſtantly recovered his dignity, and taking my hand with a benevolent ſmile, as if he had really penetrated into

into my thoughts and read my apprehenſions.—Be not alarmed, ſaid he; preſumptuous my ſecret wiſhes perhaps once were, but I have been long ſenſible of their utter impropriety; and the conviction that they never could be crowned with ſucceſs has long ſince nipped them in the bud. It is indeed a plan on which the whole happineſs of my future life depends, but of which I now confeſs to you your lovely ſiſter is the object.

Situated as I was, continued he, (for I knew not what reply to make) an inmate for months in your family, under the title of your father's friend, I enjoyed a dangerous intimacy to which no other man had acceſs. The ſnare, even at forty three, was not to be avoided; for where the mind and form both equally conſpire to charm and ſeduce, no age is exempted from feeling their united force. Againſt ſuch there is no defence, and one only cure; for where hope is completely extinguiſhed paſſion ſeldom continues to torment. In this caſe it often changes both its nature and its name, and meliorating into a tender friendſhip, conſtitutes a leſs ſelfiſh gratification inſtead of proving the miſery of our lives.

This, Miſs Seymour, has been exactly my caſe. My efforts however to eſcape from one danger have led me into another no leſs inſinuating. Tho' I intreat you to believe me, when I ſolemnly declare that I never was for one moment either ſo mad or ſo intereſted as to wiſh for my own enjoyment at the price of your amiable ſiſter's proſperity; nor while her future proſpects ſeemed favorable, and her ſituation in life promiſed to prove almoſt equal to her merits, ſhould any conſideration on earth have induced

me to make known my preſent preſumption. I ſhould have had then no remaining wiſh but for her happineſs and ſucceſs in every purſuit. The diſappointment of my wiſhes as to the latter, has however given birth to hopes that the firſt is not ſtill unattainable, and induced me to flatter myſelf that ſhould ſhe deign to allow of my moſt zealous endeavours to contribute to it, it may not prove beyond my power in ſome meaſure to conſole her for what ſhe has loſt.

Do not however imagine, that I ſhall ſo far deſcend from my age and character as to be offended by a refuſal. An admirer at my time of life muſt not pretend to aſſume the lover of twenty. I am aware of the great inequality of our years, and of many other objections your ſiſter may feel, and the force of which ſhe may not be able to ſurmount. If however ſhe thinks, after conſulting with you, that there are any advantages to compenſate theſe obſtacles, if the warmeſt attachment and the moſt unbounded indulgence, if my legal protection, and the command of a fortune much too narrow, alas! for her pretenſions and almoſt beneath her acceptance, yet with which I flatter myſelf a mind like her's could be contented;—if theſe circumſtances weigh in any degree againſt the oppoſite ſcale, I muſt ſo far adopt the language of a lover as to declare that ſhe will literally render me the happieſt of men. I ſhall receive her hand as a freſh bleſſing from heaven, and regard it as a condeſcenſion for which I ſhall ever conſider myſelf her debtor.

Some hints in this ſpeech of Mr. Howard's had confuſed me ſo extremely, that I made no attempt to anſwer or interrupt him, except by bowing my head in acknowledgment of the com-

compliments he paid me. Finding however that he now expected a reply, I thanked him in my ſiſter's name for the honour of his good opinion; as to what ſucceſs his propoſal might receive, I declared myſelf wholly ignorant; grateful ſhe cannot fail to prove, ſaid I, but what lengths that ſentiment may carry her, I am unable to conjecture.

If Miſs Fanny, ſaid he, elated with the gay hopes and lively proſpects of youth, ſhould think with reluctance on uniting herſelf to a man whoſe age correſponds ſo ill with her own, I muſt regret with fervor, but never ſhall repine at her determination. There is one obſtacle however, Miſs Seymour, which ſeverely damps my feeble hopes, and is indeed the circumſtance that has induced me to open my intentions firſt to you, as it is a particular in which I imagine you can fully ſatisfy me, and on which it ſolely depends whether I ſhall immediately mention this intereſting ſubject to your ſiſter, or be ſilent on it for ever. I have remarked, ſince her abode here, that your ſiſter has had a very zealous admirer, who cannot have failed I imagine in profiting from the many opportunities he has enjoyed of ſoliciting her favor.

Of Captain Wilmot, cried I, you need have no apprehenſions. I hope you do Fanny the juſtice to believe that the aſſiduities of ſuch a rival are by no means formidable.

He poſſeſſes at leaſt youth and good looks in his favour, replied Mr. Howard; but you relieve my mind from a weight of painful anxiety, as this is a bar which muſt not only have proved wholly inſurmountable, but one of thoſe to obviate which I could not even have attempted;

for

for though I ſhall not expect the heart of my miſtreſs, I muſt poſſeſs a certain degree of her attachment; a wiſh to pleaſe, and a willingneſs to be pleaſed, on which to build my hopes of gaining the affections of my wife: without this I ſhould be myſelf miſerable, nor would it be in my power to render her happy.

If ſhe cannot completely beſtow her heart, my dear Sir, cried I, may ſhe likewiſe withhold her hand. But I am certain my ſiſter is too ſenſible of the value of your's, to trifle with a propoſal ſo generous and diſintereſted. If—for our affections are not always in our own power, and the caprice of taſte is but too often at variance with reaſon and judgment—if ſhe cannot make a proper return, I am certain you have too much delicacy to wiſh her your's, and too much good ſenſe to be offended.

Offended! Miſs Seymour: be aſſured I never ſhall be offended; and believe me, hardly ſurpriſed.

As Mr. Howard pronounced theſe words, Fanny opened the door of the dreſſing room and looked in. The ladies, cried ſhe, are much aſtoniſhed at your long abſence; and Mrs. Hindon is ſo entertained with your tete a tete, that ſhe is abſolutely become witty on the occaſion. I wiſh you would therefore appear in your own defence, for I am quite fatigued in finding excuſes for you.

This ſhe ſaid with an air of gaiety that was inſtantly checked on perceiving the embarraſſment her ſudden appearance at this juncture occaſioned. Mr. Howard ſeemed rather at a loſs, and on his account I could not avoid feeling conſcious. Fanny finding I anſwered her with ſome degree of awkwardneſs, looked firſt to the one,

one, then to the other, as if with a deſign of penetrating into the cauſe of our being ſo evidently diſconcerted; and obſerving the raillery in the drawing room accord ſo well with the confuſed ſituation into which her appearance had thrown us, ſhe gave way to an expreſſive ſmile, and regarding me with an air that ſufficiently explained her ſuſpicions, haſtily ſhut the dreſſing-room door, and departed as if determined not to interrupt us.

At this little manœuvre, which plainly diſcovered her falſe concluſions on ſurprizing us, I could not refrain from laughing; and even Mr. Howard was not able to reſiſt half ſmiling at her miſtake. We then ſeparated; but I was forced to ſupport the whole weight of Mrs. Hindon's ridicule on being ſo long tete a tete with her brother. Her wit, however deficient in other reſpects, claims the merit of being voluble and keen in the extreme; but happily the entrance of more company ſoon relieved me.

Fanny's countenance during the whole evening exhibited a picture of ſly meaning and ſignificance, which it was extremely amuſing to behold. Every feature ſeemed filled with the importance of a newly-diſcovered ſecret: but in ſo large a party all explanation was impoſſible; and indeed had ſhe ever found an opportunity for importuning me on the ſubject, I had determined in my own mind to leave her under the influence of an unjuſt ſurmiſe rather than anticipate Mr. Howard's declaration.

One of the company happening to mention with great encomiums an Italian performer who is expected in this country in the courſe of a month, all the ladies were expreſſing their eager expectations of then ſeeing him. I fancy Hermione,

mione, whiſpered Fanny, we ſhall be mighty ſnug at Hubert Hill, (Mr. Howard's country ſeat,) by that time.

Perhaps we may, returned I with a gay air, which confirming her ſuſpicions appeared to give her much delight.

Mr. Howard at that inſtant joining us, ſhe ſeemed ready to laugh in his face out of *gayeté du coeur*. Oh! cried ſhe, ſtill in a ſoft voice to me, it will be ſo delightful; tho' to own the truth I was afraid that haughty couſin of ours might have ſtood in the way.

You are intirely out of the ſecret, ſaid I. But pray be quiet.

We were then called to a party at Commerce, and an end put to our little tete a tete, which merely ſerved to ſtrengthen Fanny in her error. Oh, thought I to myſelf, while I obſerved her eyes ſparkle with the proſpect of a happy termination thus appearing to the uncertainties and difficulties of our preſent uncomfortable ſituation, will the ſame ſatisfaction brighten your countenance and lighten your heart, my deareſt Fanny, when you find you are yourſelf the object that is to inſure us this advantage?

Captain Wilmot, who has been (perhaps deſignedly,) out of town ever ſince our affairs have worn an unfavourable appearance, came in for a few moments. His addreſs to Fanny was conſtrained; her's to him, haughty, diſdainful, and contemptuous. It is not like Fanny to ſhew ſo much ſpirit; but affronted vanity will it ſeems excite a pride otherwiſe foreign to the character. It was eaſy to diſcern that he had been apprized of the change in our circumſtances. Every word, every look and motion, betrayed not the timidity of a lover but the embarraſſment and

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perplexity of a man who felt himſelf involved in difficulties and knew not how to act. I was charmed with Fanny's behaviour. She not only ſupported her own dignity, but completely mortified the poor Captain, who tho' happy to be thus diſmiſſed, could not feel much gratified from perceiving the indifference with which the conqueſt was relinquiſhed.

When the company were gone, and Fanny and I by ourſelves, ſhe interrogated me as to the tete a tete converſation that had paſſed; but I perſiſted in evading all her enquiries; for it is but juſtice to allow Mr. Howard to plead his own cauſe, while her mind is unbiaſſed by any previous determination. Let him at leaſt reap what benefit may reſult from an unprejudiced ſurprize on finding herſelf warmly ſolicited by a man whom I know ſhe eſteems and reſpects.

I believe you will not be aſtoniſhed, when I confeſs that did I think this a point in which it would be allowable for me to interfere, I ſhould prove a warm advocate in Mr. Howard's favour, and that I anxiouſly wiſh this union may take place. Did Fanny's heart feel the ſlighteſt repugnance, far ſhould I be from deſiring an event, againſt which in that caſe principle and delicacy would equally revolt: but if ſhe is capable of entertaining ſuch ſentiments as will allow her without reluctance to beſtow her hand on that amiable man, I think I could almoſt pronounce her felicity in the marriage ſtate ſecured; and what a happy aſylum in our preſent ſituation muſt the houſe of Mr. Howard prove, when authoriſed to live under his continued protection by the ties of relationſhip as well as by thoſe of friendſhip. It is indeed an event which muſt at once relieve us from the difficul-

ties that ſeem to await our unconnected ſtate. Yet you may conjecture I would not for worlds inſinuate a hint towards urging her to a ſtep with which, in her place, I feel at this moment I myſelf could not comply.

My ſiſter ſeemed diſappointed on finding her conjectures had been without foundation, and warmly joined in ſounding the praiſes of Mr. Howard; adding, that in ſpite of the diſproportion of our ages there was no man ſhe would eſteem ſo highly as a brother. Yet Sophia, diſintereſted as we ſometimes flatter ourſelves we are, we view with different eyes the ſame object regarded as our own choice or as that of even our deareſt and moſt intimate friend; and forcible as were Fanny's expreſſions, I cannot conjecture with any degree of certainty how ſhe will act. My influence over her mind is not trifling; but even were I ſtill more convinced than I am that I ſhould aſcertain her happineſs by promoting this affair, I ſhould not poſſeſs reſolution ſufficient for interfering on a point of ſuch infinite moment, eſpecially at this time, when a peculiar delicacy deters me. Fanny, on my account as well as her own, may wiſh to conquer a reluctance ſo adverſe to our mutual comfort, and which ſo many powerful motives of prudence and reaſon oppoſe, while at the ſame time this conflict may prove ſo ſevere, that it were cruelty to adviſe a ſtep which may in this caſe be denominated a ſacrifice.

SUNDAY EVENING.

On our return from morning prayers, I retired to read in my own apartment. Fanny remained in the parlour below, but joined me an hour after in the utmoſt perturbation. On entering,

tering, ſhe haſtily approached me, and throwing her arms around my neck, burſt into a flood of tears, which inſtantly informed me of what ſhe was unable by words to expreſs.

My deareſt girl, ſaid I, whence proceeds this agitation?

She could not immediately reply: but at laſt —Oh Hermione! exclaimed ſhe, what have I to tell you—Mr. Howard is my lover.

Well my dear, ſaid I ſmiling, that is no very great calamity.

Good heavens! could you ever have ſuſpected ſuch a thing? Could you ever have imagined that any thing ſo unlucky would have happened!

I believe I could, anſwered I. But why unlucky? How comes it that the mere mention of a propoſal which muſt be at leaſt acknowledged diſintereſted, from an amiable and worthy object, ſhould give you this uneaſineſs. There are no rigid guardians to urge your compliance, nor, alas! parents to command your obedience; and believe me, my love, your ſiſter will not even preſume to adviſe on a ſubject in which your own feelings and ſentiments only are to be conſulted.

I ſoon found, however, that her tears were thoſe of agitation, doubt, and timidity. Diſguſt and repugnance had no part in her emotions. She confeſſed ſhe eſteemed Mr. Howard; that ſhe believed him one of the beſt men in the world; but I never once thought of being his wife, ſaid ſhe. I regarded him as a friend ſent by heaven to conſole us for the loſs of one parent who is gone for ever, and of another who diſowns us. I cannot think of marrying him. The idea is almoſt unnatural; for the poſſibility

lity of ſuch an event never entered my imagination. Indeed I always concluded his partiality to me was that of a father, and that the diſparity of our years would have alone proved ſufficient to have prevented the very notion of ſuch an attachment. Had it been you, I ſhould not have experienced the ſlighteſt ſurpriſe; for I have more than once ſuſpected that he loved you, particularly before we left Languedoc; but for myſelf, I always imagined he viewed me in the light of a girl who might have amuſed perhaps, but who had no likelihood of intereſting him. Oh! what made him think of me, repeated ſhe ſeveral times in the greateſt perplexity.

Calm your agitation, my dear Fanny, cried I. Conſider you are ſolicited, but not compelled. I have on my part long ſuſpected that you was the object of Mr. Howard's affections, and I ſincerely own have ſecretly wiſhed his paſſion that ſucceſs which in my opinion it ſo juſtly merits. I am convinced the attachment and protection of a character like his muſt ſecure happineſs to the woman whom he honours with his choice, provided her heart is properly diſpoſed for feeling and anſwering the tenderneſs of his. If this is however wanting, believe me Mr. Howard himſelf has too much delicacy to demand the hand which prudence alone beſtows on him; and I am certain poſſeſſes too large a ſhare both of good ſenſe and modeſty to be diſobliged. If then you feel the leaſt actual repugnance to this union, after having maturely weighed and conſidered all ſides of the queſtion, heſitate not to tell him ſo without coquetry or affectation.

Repugnance is a ſtrong word, ſaid ſhe after a pauſe. We are under infinite obligations to him,

him, and he is our only friend. I ſhould be ſhocked to diſoblige him. But he has ſo ſurprized me, that I know not what to think of the matter, nor how to collect my ſcattered thoughts to ponder on the conſequences. Now tell me ſeriouſly, Hermione, what would you do in my caſe?

Why I will tell you ſincerely, ſaid I. Were I you, with your diſpoſition, your gratitude to Mr. Howard, and your indifference to every other man, I believe I ſhould be his wife.

Yet I am not the leaſt in love with him, cried ſhe.

Involuntarily I was about to reply, that being romantically in love was by all accounts far from an indiſpenſable requiſite towards happineſs in the married ſtate; but conſcious how different my own private ſentiments were from according with this opinion, I checked myſelf from touching on an argument that carried not conviction to my own mind, though from my knowledge of Fanny's temper it might have been not improperly offered to her, and only added, that her own feelings muſt direct her.

We were interrupted by Mrs. Hindon, who came to inform us that the carriage waited to carry us to afternoon prayers. I believe poor Fanny's devotions were not a little diſturbed; and on our return I obſerved ſhe met the eyes of Mr. Howard with a confuſion which ſeemed to forebode no great ſeverity.

I had evidently ſhewn on which ſide my ſuffrage reſted; but I cautiouſly withheld any advice likely to prejudice her mind, which tho' diffident and fearful, appeared neither averſe nor determined.

Adieu.

H. SEYMOUR.

LETTER XIV.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

FEB. 22.

WELL, my dear Sophia, after diſappointments ſo ſevere, and proſpects ſo cheerleſs and dreary, the ſcene begins to brighten. Fanny has at laſt yielded in Mr. Howard's favour, and finds herſelf perfectly ſatisfied and at eaſe now that her future fate ſeems determined.

Mr. Howard appears delighted with his good fortune, tho' a propriety of feeling peculiar to himſelf deters him from teſtifying it in a manner too pointed. An admirer after forty muſt not, as he juſtly obſerved, adopt the behaviour of one twenty years younger. There is a dignity ſuited to that period, which even love, all-powerful love, muſt not entirely diſcard. He poſſeſs all the tenderneſs, while he has exploded the flights of a lover; and Fanny, who imagined that courtſhip muſt be ſerious, aweful and formal, and that ſhe ſhould find an unuſual embarraſſment attend her new ſituation, is charmed to perceive that Mr. Howard is exactly what he was before, and that ſhe is if poſſible ſtill more at eaſe with him than formerly.

This is rendered more practicable, as they have taken the precaution of keeping the preſent poſture of affairs a profound ſecret from this family; nor do they intend informing them how matters are likely to be concluded till it is unneceſſary any longer to retain them in ignorance. Indeed Mrs. Hindon's entire diſregard of delicacy,

licacy, added to her paſſion for raillery, makes her the laſt perſon with whom one would incline to intruſt a ſubject of this nature.

Mr. Howard is extremely urgent with Fanny to have the ceremony which is to unite them as ſoon as poſſible performed; and as a thouſand reaſons conſpire to make us wiſh ourſelves no longer a burthen on the conſtrained civilities of Mrs. Hindon, Fanny has promiſed that after the uſual forms of law are concluded, ſhe ſhall not invent unneceſſary delays.

Since my laſt Mrs. Hindon has more than once renewed her favorite topic. It is not without infinite reluctance that ſhe relinquiſhes any plan to which in her own mind ſhe has attached an importance. Lady Farnford however ſeems to have given up all hope; and her ſon, I underſtand from Miſs Parſons, has been twice refuſed admitance at Mrs. Hindon's door, in purſuance no doubt of his mother's requeſt to her friend to give no countenance or encouragement to a paſſion, now deprived of all the oſtentatious advantages that once rendered it ſo deſirable.

Captain Wilmot appears to bear his diſappointment with an admirable good grace; though the frigid hauteur with which Fanny behaved to him the evening they met, by diſcovering the unconcern of her heart, and opening his eyes to the falſity of his ſelf-ſufficient ſecurity of her affections, muſt have proved very little gratifying to the all-potent vanity of his character. He has taken care to be conſtantly engaged ever ſince, except one morning, when he found courage to ſtep in for ten minutes. Fanny was above ſtairs when he entered; but followed him a ſhort time after into the

the parlour. He bluſhed extremely, and appeared much embarraſſed on paying her the uſual compliments; nor did his awkwardneſs ſeem leſs conſpicuous from an air of forced gaiety with which he endeavoured to diſguiſe it. Finding his ſituation, in ſpite of all his efforts, exceedingly uncomfortable, he made haſte to change it, and abruptly took leave.

FEB. 25.

Fanny and Mr. Howard have this day had a long converſation together, in the courſe of which he laid before her the ſtate of his finances, and ſuggeſted the plan of life which he thought would be moſt conducive to their mutual happineſs.

His paternal eſtate, Hubert Hill, does not exceed three hundred and twenty pounds a year; and this, with a couple of thouſands bequeathed him by a friend, conſtitutes his whole fortune; nor has he any addition to hope for independent of my ſiſter's precarious pittance when Mr. Benſeley's affairs are ſettled. This no doubt is a very ſlender income, eſpecially if a numerous family ſhould bleſs their union; yet as Mr. Howard is a man of moderate views, and addicted to no expenſive pleaſures, and Fanny has ever been accuſtomed to ſolitude and frugality, if not abſolutely to a ſtrict œconomy, I think it ſufficient, with ſome attention, for all the neceſſary indulgencies of life.

His little ſeat is ſituated, he ſays, in a delightful part of the country. The grounds are laid out with taſte; and the houſe, tho' ſmall, is fitted up with infinite neatneſs in a ruſtic

ſtyle.

ſtyle. This he propoſes making their conſtant reſidence; and hopes, by living himſelf on the ſpot, to improve it to great advantage, being extremely fond of farming himſelf.

He did not fail, in the very firſt moments of Fanny's approbation, to give me the warmeſt and moſt preſſing invitation to join their family. Indeed without that condition I believe he never would have prevailed with his bride, for ſhe has ever expreſſed the moſt painful reluctance at the idea of being ſeparated from me. It was no ſmall ſatisfaction to me however, to perceive the cordiality and eagerneſs with which Mr. Howard made this requeſt. Partial as I have always been, ſaid he, to the abode of my youth, with how much delight muſt I now enjoy it, when bleſt with companions who poſſeſs the power of converting any ſpot into a paradiſe!

He ſets out for Hubert Hill to-morrow, to give the neceſſary directions previous to our going down; and in the mean while all other preparations are making, that the ceremony may take place as ſoon as he returns. Are you not entertained with Fanny's metamorphoſis into a ſedate, ruſtic farmer's wife, who when you knew her but three years ago was a little wild giddy girl of thirteen? I am ſatisfied however ſhe will conduct herſelf to admiration in that capacity. She is poſſeſſed of a very chearful, contented diſpoſition, the firſt bleſſing of Providence; and the reverſes of fortune which the laſt five months have produced, by compleatly convincing her of the fallaciouſneſs of her ſanguine expectations of the gay enjoyments of the world, formed in ignorance and ſolitude, have diſpoſed her mind for reliſhing and returning to the pure pleaſures of retirement and domeſtic life. In

ſociety,

ſociety, ſhe has experienced only mortifications, diſappointments, and diſguſts, inſtead of finding it, as ſhe had concluded, a ſcene of perpetual gaiety, admiration, and delight. In lieu of univerſal conqueſt, her admirers have been tranſient, and her lover inſincere. She has made no friends ſince ſhe left France; and is therefore the more eager to cement to herſelf him who has proved on trial ſtrongly and truly attached to her.

As for myſelf, this event is every thing I can wiſh. It ſecures me an agreeable home with thoſe I love, and conveys me from this hateful city, which I wiſh from my ſoul I had never entered.

MARCH 3.

Mr. Howard is returned from his excurſion, much pleaſed with ſome little improvements he has begun; and the papers are now ready for ſigning. Mr. Howard, in the event of no family, leaves his wife ſole heireſs of all he poſſeſſes: but ſhould any children ſpring from this marriage, her jointure is two hundred per annum. Having no friend to conſult on this occaſion, all ſhe feared was Mr. Howard's too great generoſity; and as ſhe was aſhamed even to mention pecuniary matters to him, I was unwillingly obliged on this occaſion to be her agent, and abſolutely inſiſted that if her own money, ſhould any be recovered, was ſettled upon her as he propoſed, a deduction of equal value ſhould be made from this ſtipulation. Every thing therefore relative to ſettlements is finally adjuſted; and but that Fanny's timidity

makes

makes her catch at trifles to delay the aweful ceremony, things ere now would have been concluded.

Fearing Mrs. Hindon would be extremely diſobliged at Fanny's conduct in concealing from her this affair, I perſuaded her the other day to confeſs her preſent ſituation; and ſuggeſted that as that lady, from whatever motives, had received us into her family, and teſtified towards us a thouſand civilities with great apparent hoſpitality and kindneſs, ſhe had reaſon to be not a little offended at the want of confidence and cordiality this ſecrecy betrayed; beſides common report would ſoon render all further concealment uſeleſs, and deprive Fanny of an opportunity of paying her the compliment of confidence.

She intreated me to undertake this commiſſion for her. It was not an agreeable one; but as to Fanny it would perhaps have been ſtill more awkward, I conſented.

Good heavens! cried Mrs. Hindon, as ſoon as I had hinted the connection which was likely ſoon to place my ſiſter among the liſt of her relations—married to my brother! Miſs Fanny to be my brother's wife! Well I declare he is extremely ſly, for I could have laid a bet that you were his favorite of the two. He is a bold man however, to think of incumbering himſelf with a wife and family in his preſent circumſtances. I wiſh them happy with all my heart; but I plainly perceive he had his own private reaſons for regarding my poor nephew's propoſals with ſo much diſapprobation. Well, every one for themſelves in this world; but I always ſuſpect ſome ſelf-intereſted motive at bottom when I hear ſuch a piece of work made about

ſentiment,

ſentiment, and ſo many profeſſions of *diſintereſted friendſhip*; I think beſides, ſince matters were ſo far advanced, that Mr. Hindon and myſelf might have been ſooner made acquainted with a love affair that was going on under our own roof.

I pleaded Fanny's diffidence as an apology; but my excuſe was in fact extremely lame, and was not eaſily admitted. Mrs. Hindon could with difficulty prevail on herſelf to pardon the diſreſpect. But this ſtory had gone in all points ſo contrary to her plans and wiſhes, that I could forgive a little ill humour occaſioned by chagrin, and found it not on the whole ſo hard to reconcile her to it as I had feared. A marriage, tho' even not of her own negociating, afforded ſome ſpeculation for her active mind to work on; and ſo fond is ſhe of being officiouſly buſy, that ſhe has ſet off to-day, accompanied by Fanny, to aſſiſt with the utmoſt cordiality and eagerneſs in the purchaſe of ſome bridal apparatus.

SIX IN THE EVENING.

I had hardly laid down my pen this morning, when Mr. Roatſley was announced. The ſight of him, ſo wholly unprepared as I was for the interview, threw me into the utmoſt confuſion, and I am certain I muſt have performed the firſt ceremonials with great awkwardneſs. The recollection of his late converſation with Mr. Howard, of which I had been ſolely the ſubject, and the obligations his generous conduct had laid me under, overpowered me with embarraſſment. I knew not how to expreſs my gratitude for a ſervice ſo eſſential, which yet from a thouſand

thouſand circumſtances I bluſhed to remember, and poſſeſſed ſcarce courage to touch on: added to this, the diſcovery I had made ſince our laſt meeting, and the mortifications attending our rejected application to his family, ſtruck me ſo forcibly, that I was in agitation inexpreſſible when he entered.

He comes, thought I, at once to convince me how injurious were my ſuſpicions of his pride and duplicity, to expreſs his regret for the ill conduct of his relations, and to ſhew me how diſſimilar is his generous mind from that of his unfeeling mother.

So certain was I of the intention of his viſit, that I even wiſhed the explanation over, which muſt to him prove ſo embarraſſing, as it was likely ſo little to redound to the honor of his family, and expected every moment when the ſubject ſhould be introduced. But moſt carefully did he guard againſt every topic that could lead to this point; which he evidently avoided with the moſt ſedulous precaution. Yet his manner poſſeſſed that inſinuating attention, and his voice that winning ſoftneſs, which ſeemed to imply the utmoſt ſatisfaction in my company, and which beſtows on *his* a charm, that may be felt, Sophia, alas, too acutely! but which cannot be delineated.

The intereſting elegance of his addreſs is indeed ſo uncommonly engaging, that I think it muſt be wholly impoſſible even for a ſtranger to behold him enter without pleaſure, or ſee him depart without experiencing regret. It is not alone that he is perfectly well bred and intelligent, for from moderate parts, poliſhed by education and knowledge of the world, this may be expected, and uncharacteriſtic of the Engliſh nation

nation as the refinement of good breeding is ſuppoſed to be, I have ſeen, ſince my reſidence here, more than one perſon to whom I think that panegyric is juſtly due; but Mr. Roatſley's mind ſpeaks in his countenance and in his manner, and confers on every look and on every motion that grace which a diſpoſition compleatly amiable, and talents thoroughly well cultivated, cannot fail to diffuſe over the appearance and behaviour.

My firſt flutters giving way to the reſpectful eaſe of his converſation, I took courage at length to mention the obligation I owed him. I have been inexpreſſibly deſirous, ſaid I, of an opportunity to return you my moſt grateful acknowledgments for the attention and trouble you have been ſo humane as to beſtow upon an affair which has occaſioned me more uneaſineſs and perplexity than it is poſſible to conceive.

I am then extremely ſorry, cried he with warmth, that my preſence ſhould have induced you for an inſtant to recall a ſubject ſo painful. Let it be baniſhed, I beſeech you, for ever from your remembrance, and along with it all expreſſions of gratitude to which I cannot flatter myſelf I merit the ſlighteſt claim. Heaven knows what exertions I would make, what anxiety I would undergo, to merit the approbation of Miſs Seymour; but as yet I am not ſo happy as to congratulate myſelf with having had it in my power to perform any ſervice that could deſerve her thanks. Let me know, my dear Madam, added he, by what means I can procure a title to that happineſs, and you ſhall perceive, by the avidity with which I ſhall obey your commands, how infinitely I ſhould prize my good fortune in obliging you.

Does

Does he wiſh me, thought I, to apply to him to intercede with Lord Belmont; or are theſe profeſſions mere words of courſe, to which are annexed neither meaning nor intention? I was piqued that he adhered ſo determinedly to the reſolutions of his relations, and only made a ſlight inclination of my head very gravely in return to this ſpeech.

A degree of ſurprize was evident in his countenance at the ſtatelineſs of my manner; the cauſe I think he muſt have been with eaſe able to comprehend. However he choſe to place it to another account; and finding that an air of chagrin involuntarily hung on my features—— Miſs Seymour, ſaid he, after ſeveral ineffectual attempts to amuſe me on different ſubjects which a ſlight degree of penetration ſufficed to ſhew did not intereſt me——I cannot but perceive that I have been ſo unfortunate as to offend you; and ſo ſevere, ſo painful is this idea, that tho' my confeſſion may at firſt rather encreaſe than diminiſh your diſpleaſure, I cannot reſiſt truſting to your candour and indulgence by a ſincere avowal of the only circumſtance wherein I think it is poſſible for me to have given cauſe for your diſpleaſure.

Finding I made no reply, for in truth I knew not what to anſwer—I ſincerely confeſs, continued he, and let, I beſeech you, the ſeverity of this confeſſion plead in my behalf, that after having been bleſt with your company that happy evening at Dover, my ideas and expectations of the dignity of your behaviour were raiſed to ſo juſt an height, that they could not but ſuffer ſome abatement on witneſſing what I could not but conſider as an impropriety, and which I am certain Miſs Seymour herſelf would have regarded

garded as an indelicacy. I am conſcious I ought to have judged leſs raſhly. I know that I ought to have ſuſpected my own eyes, rather than any indecorum in you; but I was led to do you injuſtice by a multiplicity of circumſtances, which can hardly have given more pain to your feelings than they have conveyed to mine; and you may recollect, Madam, that the inſtant you appeared ſtill more unaccountable, inſtead of plunging deeper into doubt, I penetrated into the whole myſtery, and not only in my own mind fully acquitted you of the imprudence of a clandeſtine interview with a young man who merited only your ſcorn and deteſtation, but alſo immediately perceived that though the whole was wrapt in obſcurity, the veil was not placed over your conduct by your own hands; and I no longer heſitated to aſk an explanation from Mr. Howard, ſince I was compleatly convinced all muſt redound to your honour.

Oh! Sir, cried I, penetrated by this ſpeech and the eagerneſs with which he entered on his juſtification, be aſſured when I reflect on this painful affair, it is not only without the ſlighteſt diſpleaſure at any part of your conduct, but with the utmoſt gratitude for the humane intereſt you teſtified in it.

May I then flatter myſelf I am forgiven, cried he warmly, and kiſſed my hand with a fervor that dyed me with crimſon.

I had juſt withdrawn it, when Mrs. Hindon and Fanny returned from their excurſion, followed by a ſervant loaded with various purchaſes.

I introduced Mr. Roatſley to Mrs. Hindon, who appeared much delighted with the acquiſition of an acquaintance of his rank and figure,

and began converſing with her accuſtomed volubility and avidity even before ſhe had ſeated herſelf.

As ſhe held a pretty large parcel in her hands, part of Fanny's paraphernalia, he politely offered to relieve her by placing it on the table.

Perhaps Sir, cried ſhe facetiouſly, theſe ladies may generouſly reward your trouble by preſenting you with part of the contents.

I ſhall be much delighted with the honor of any gift from theſe ladies, returned he. But pray may I be allowed to aſk of what nature is the donation?

Poor Fanny bluſhed up to the ears. Good God, Madam! cried ſhe, with a reproachful look.

Nay, anſwered ſhe, laughing immoderately, I'm ſure I ſhan't tell; but if Mr. Roatſley ſhould be clever enough to gueſs it, you know neither of us can help that. Lord, look, look, cried ſhe with entire diſregard to Fanny's confuſion, how conſcious Miſs Fanny appears of the ſecret: and Miſs Seymour, I declare ſhe bluſhes too, as much as to ſay—but I muſt take care not to blab.

Roatſley ſmiled at our mutual confuſion; for indeed I felt extremely for poor Fanny, and was not a little aſhamed alſo for Mrs. Hindon's indelicate raillery.

If my enquiries give the ladies ſo much pain, ſaid he, I am afraid I muſt be contented to remain in ignorance; tho' I confeſs my curioſity is raiſed to the higheſt pitch to diſcover this important ſecret.

Mr. Hindon juſt then entered; and an introduction taking place between him and Mr. Roatſley, I was in hopes Fanny would have

been relieved from her perſecution. His lady, however, ſeemed determined ſuch an excellent joke ſhould not have ſo ſpeedy a termination

My dear, cried ſhe, let us ſee if *you* can ſolve this riddle, which has puzzled Mr. Roatſley's brain in vain to unravel, and the bare mention of which has plunged theſe ladies into the moſt painful confuſion. The ſecret, or rather the ſolution, is contained in that package of brown paper that lies on the table.

I ſhall take a very ſimple method of diſcovery, returned he, and ſeizing the parcel as Fanny was flying to ſecure it, he inſtantly cut the packthread with which it was tied, and holding it above her reach, a number of favors compoſed of white and ſilver dropt on the ground.

The ſecret is diſcovered at length, exclaimed Mrs. Hindon, laughing with great vociferation. Well I'm ſure ladies you need not care much, for it is of a nature that will ſoon ſpeak for itſelf, and I'm ſure you muſt acknowledge I ſaid never a word of the matter.

It is then a matrimonial one I preſume, ſaid Mr. Roatſley, with a conſtrained air and in a very low voice to Mrs. Hindon.

Yes, returned ſhe, ſmiling expreſſively, as if ſhe was not at liberty to ſatisfy him further, though ſhe evidently ſeemed impelled by a ſtrong inclination to enter upon family tranſactions, equally unſolicited and impertinent.

Poor Fanny returned to her ſeat much aſhamed and confuſed; while Mr. Hindon following, laughed moſt indelicately in her face; and as I appeared little leſs embarraſſed—Poor Miſs Seymour! cried he half ironically, tapping me familiarly on the back, Mr. Roatſley I am certain will

will agree with me that *your* complexion requires no foreign aid, ſo pray don't bluſh ſo very deep:—which piece of advice you may ſuppoſe was not much calculated to enable me to profit from it.

Mr. Roatſley finding his preſence rather augmented the awkwardneſs of Fanny's ſituation, ſuddenly wiſhed us good morning and departed abruptly.

This tranſaction was in itſelf trifling, had it not ſhewn the family with whom we reſide in a vulgar and abſurd point of view; and the affair of the parcel could have excited neither curioſity nor ſuſpicion, had not Mrs. Hindon beſtowed an importance on it by her ill-judged raillery, ſufficient to convince Mr. Roatſley that ſomething "more was meant than met the ear." However, except in having given poor Fanny ſome uneaſy moments, it was of little conſequence, as ſhe has at length conſented that Friday ſhall unite her with Mr. Howard; and immediately after the ceremony, at which only Miſs Parſons and this family are to be preſent, we ſet off for Hubert Hill; which being ſeventy five miles from town, we ſhall not reach till the ſecond evening.

But tell me, my Sophia, how ſhall I account for Roatſley's behaviour during our tete a tete this morning? To ſuppoſe him entirely ignorant of an affair which muſt have naturally and unavoidably occaſioned ſome diſturbance, and no ſmall degree of diſcuſſion in his family, is to imagine what is not only improbable, but I own almoſt impoſſible. Have I not reaſon then to be diſpleaſed with the inflexible pride, (alas, it is a family failing!) which his conduct too plainly indicates: ſtill perhaps retaining the em-

bers of that trifling partiality he ſeemed once diſpoſed to feel for me, yet proudly aſhamed, or weakly afraid to venture on a ſtep his family unjuſtly prohibits, he ſeeks my company and converſation under the pretended veil of ignorance. But under a pretence ſo ſhallow, never ſhall he receive the ſhadow of my notice, never ſhall I countenance that perſon as my friend, who diſdains to acknowledge he is allied to me.

Yet, my dear, how impoſſible is it to ſee Mr. Roatſley and to retain diſpleaſure! In vain I call offended dignity and wounded pride to the aid of indignation. He is abſent, and I blame him; but when preſent, to preſerve even a cold reſerve, proves the utmoſt exertion of my reſolution.

H. SEYMOUR.

LETTER XV.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

MARCH 6.

HOW infinitely inſinuating is this proud couſin of our's. I become every hour more afraid of myſelf, yet every moment exhauſts my imagination with efforts to diſcover indulgent motives for a conduct which reaſon and feeling equally condemn.

Mrs. Hindon having aſked the favor of his company to her aſſembly laſt night, I was not ſurpriſed to ſee him enter: for I confeſs I expected he would profit from her invitation, tho' at the time he had hinted ſomething of a prior engage-

engagement, which he ſaid in all probability would prevent him. But never was I ſo much ſtruck, ſo much confounded by his appearance. How inconceivably ſuperior did he look to every one of his own ſex who was preſent!

There is an air of dignity, I had almoſt ſaid of grandeur, in his figure, equally the reſult of the moſt elegant ſymmetry of form and the moſt lively penetration and intelligence of countenance, which to a ſuperficial obſerver might, I ſhould imagine, at firſt ſight wear the aſpect of *hauteur*, did not the amiable ſoftneſs of his addreſs entirely contradict that idea; and I make no doubt but this contraſt may augment the prepoſſeſſion which every one on the ſlighteſt acquaintance ſeems inclined to feel for him; for all muſt be delighted to perceive that perſon who appears, tho' merely from the graceful ſuperiority of his height, to look down on others, deſcend on converſing with them into the gentleſt and leaſt aſſuming equality.

The apartments were filled with company before he arrived; and being ſurrounded by a group of young people at one end of the room, he did not immediately diſtinguiſh me.

Shall I confeſs that I felt impatient on finding myſelf unnoticed, and hurt at perceiving that Mrs. Hindon, on his entrance, detained him in converſation a conſiderable time? I found ſome conſolation, however, in obſerving that he ſeemed to give her his attention with conſtraint, and that he often caſt his eyes with anxiety around, as if but little intereſted in what he heard.

During this interval Miſs Farnford and another young lady detained me in an inſipid chit chat, while both my eyes and mind wandered

to another ſubject. Having ſoon diſcovered him however, he inſtantly engaged their admiration, and attracted their whole attention.

Who's that, pray, Miſs Pierſon? exclaimed Miſs Farnford.

It is the handſome Mr. Roatſley. I'm ſure you muſt have heard of him, returned the other.

He is abſolutely the handſomeſt creature I ever beheld. Pray is he a man of fortune?

Lord, cried the friend, don't you know that he is brother to Lord Linroſe, and poſſeſſed of heaven knows how many thouſands a year? He is juſt returned from abroad, in conſequence of a ſplendid inheritance left him by an uncle in Ireland; and all the world ſays that he is amazingly clever, accompliſhed and agreeable; indeed he has all the appearance of it, for he is aſtoniſhingly handſome.

I ſhould ſuppoſe then he a'nt married, ſince he is ſo lately come home?

No, but juſt on the verge of being ſo. The wedding cloaths and equipages are all beſpoke, and I'm told his marriage is to take place immediately.

Oh! Sophia! don't you feel for me at this moment? My ſenſations were unutterable. I felt as if my blood was congea'ed within my veins, and every pulſe had refuſed any longer to perform its function. I had not courage ſufficient to aſk Miſs Pierſon what authority ſhe had for this unlook'd-for information; but my companions, unſuſpicious of my agitations, went on with their converſation in a half whiſper, and Miſs Farnford's curioſity ſoon ſatisfied mine.

But who pray is the happy woman? cried ſhe gayly.

Lord

Lord Mortonbury's daughter, Lady Elizabeth Sedley. She is a piece of perfection by all accounts. Nobody before was ever ſo accompliſhed. She has all ſorts of languages—muſic, painting, nay poetry too, at her finger's ends; then ſhe is reckoned a prodigious fine woman, and dances divinely. Beſides all this, ſhe has a vaſt fortune, being an only child; ſo that ſhe is eſteemed the firſt match almoſt in England; and they ſay that her father and Lord Belmont, Mr. Roatſley's grandfather, have all along deſigned them for each other, even from their infancy.

Well, that's ſo odd in old people, returned Miſs Farnford. I'm ſure if papa was to do ſo by me, I ſhould hate my huſband horridly, were he ever ſo handſome.

That is far from being the caſe with Lady Elizabeth; for it ſeems ſhe is vaſtly in love with him, and indeed no wonder, for I ſuſpect in her ſituation you would not carry your love of contradiction quite ſo far.

Miſs Pierſon's converſation was ſuddenly interrupted by Mr. Roatſley's approach; who having juſt at this moment diſcovered me, came forward in the height of my perturbation, with a ſmile which was ſuddenly on regarding me converted into a look of apprehenſion and anxiety. The intelligence to which I had juſt been liſtening, could not fail to give me the moſt uneaſy emotions, and the mortification attending this ſecret confeſſion, wounded me no leſs. What? cried I to myſelf, have I been all this while weakly allowing an attachment to ſteal on my heart, which can neither be excuſed by reaſon nor principle? Why do I envy another that happineſs which I never had the

ſlighteſt grounds for believing would ever prove mine? and why ſhould I feel myſelf ſo unaccountably intereſted in the fate of a man, of whoſe pride and inflexibility, ſpite of his inſinuating exterior, I have ſuch glaring proofs?

Theſe interrogations, tho' meant to rouſe me from my too ſuſceptible weakneſs, had by no means the deſired effect; and ſcarcely had Mr. Roatſley begun the uſual enquiries after my health, when he added——I am afraid, Miſs Seymour, your countenance replies too plainly to my queſtion. I am afraid you find yourſelf indiſpoſed. Perhaps the heat of the room affects you. Will you allow me the honour of conducting you to the other, where you will have more air, I imagine? Hardly able to reply, I allowed him to lead me away, tacitly confirming his conjecture, partly from the effects of an unconquerable embarraſſment which ſeized me at that inſtant, and partly with the view of concealing my agitation from my two companions, of whoſe ſuſpicions I was apprehenſive.

Miſs Farnford however, the inſtant ſhe ſaw me addreſſed by a young man of ſo elegant an appearance, contrived to pin herſelf to me for the reſt of the evening, in hopes of improving this accidental meeting into an acquaintance; and made ſo many attempts to attract his notice and engage him in converſation, that I really bluſhed for the forward and childiſh coquetry of her behaviour; particularly as from ſeeing her conſtantly by my ſide, or hanging on my arm, he muſt have concluded her one of my moſt intimate friends; and tho' he anſwered her with civility, and the moſt ſcrupulous good breeding,

he

he ſeemed by no means charmed with her ſtile of manners.

She was ſo much delighted with him however, that I was in continual pain leſt he ſhould overhear her expreſſions of admiration——a matter which gave her very little concern. Pray don't you think this Mr. Roatſley the fineſt young man you ever beheld in your life? ſaid ſhe at length, when he had turned for a moment to ſpeak with Mrs. Hindon.

Yes, he is handſome, ſaid I, with an affected air of indifference. At leaſt I believe he is thought ſo.

Thought ſo! repeated ſhe; Lord, but don't you think ſo? I never ſaw any perſon have ſo much the look of a man of faſhion. But he is juſt going to be married.

Is he? ſaid I, faintly.

Yes indeed, and the lady is ſo in love with him as never any body was before. Indeed I don't wonder at that circumſtance in the leaſt. But pray don't you think it is too much to be Mr. Roatſley and the poſſeſſor of ſuch prodigious wealth at once? Don't you think ſo?

Yes, perhaps;—oh no, not at all, returned I with an emotion to which only Miſs Farnford could have been blind; but eager to talk, ſhe perceived not my perplexity, or attributed it to my late indiſpoſition.

But pray tell me, how did you become ſo well acquainted with him?

We croſſed over in the ſame packet boat from Calais.

Did you indeed? I wiſh I had made one of the party. I dare ſay it muſt have been a very agreeable one.

Yes, pleaſant enough, ſaid I, quite fatigued with giving attention to a train of queſtions ſo little intereſting, while my thoughts were entirely occupied with a ſubject that proved, alas! too much ſo.

Mr. Roatſley again joining us, prevented her proceeding; and Lady Farnford's carriage being announced, Miſs was ſummoned ſoon after to attend her mother. Being then relieved from the frivolous interruption of our companion, who entered into a converſation, the life and ſpirit of which were maintained ſolely by his own efforts; for though I exerted myſelf to the utmoſt, a weight unſpeakable oppreſſed my ſpirits, and wholly dampt the ſatisfaction this evening would have otherwiſe afforded.

Yet I own his behaviour puzzled and aſtoniſhed me. Had you witneſſed what paſſed during this evening, Sophia; had you beheld the unconſcious eaſe with which he converſed, you never could have ſuſpected that any deſire of concealment lay upon his mind. All ſeemed open, ſincere, and unreſerved. He apparently wiſhed me to confeſs many little circumſtances relating to our life abroad, and even preſumed to hint at enquiries reſpecting my father and our abode in Languedoc, tho' with a politeneſs quite diſtinct from impertinent inquiſitiveneſs, and with which, in a ſtranger, I might have been gratified, ſuppoſing them the reſult of intereſt in my concerns; but which in my couſin I could only ſuſpect to be the conſequence of an imperfect information that had excited his curioſity. Theſe are concluſions, however, which did not till afterwards occur. At the time, I could think of nothing but the intelligence that had juſt been communicated to me, and

and the deſtruction of a thouſand airy dreams which had made the ſtrongeſt impreſſion in my boſom.

Oh! my Sophia! however you may and muſt condemn, do not deſpiſe me for the weakneſs which every line of my journal diſplays. Good heavens! were any eyes but yours to ſee my writing! The very idea makes me tremble. But to unburthen my mind to you, by diſcloſing my inquietudes, is the only ſolace of my exiſtence. When I reflect how unreſerved, how perfectly free from concealment or reſtraint, are my communications, I can ſcarce conceive how I poſſeſs reſolution to tranſmit them to writing. Indeed had not an early habit of confidence familiariſed me to the idea of laying open my heart upon paper, I ſhould never have found courage to riſk the hazards of ſo long a journey as they muſt take before they reach your hands.

Mr. Roatſley declined joining any of the card parties, tho' ſtrongly ſolicited by Mrs. Hindon; and Fanny being engaged at the commerce table, he gave to me his whole attention. He enquired what were my engagements in public, and hoped to have the pleaſure of meeting me either at Ranelagh next evening, or at the Opera on Saturday: but I ſaid, that on my ſiſter's account I ſhould not have it in my power to viſit any public place till her affairs were finally ſettled; and that immediately after it, I ſhould accompany her to the country.

What? ſaid he with ſome ſurpriſe, at this unpropitious ſeaſon do you think of leaving town? I hope, however, your ſtay will be ſhort. The country can have no attractions at preſent.

I have

I have no thoughts of returning again to town, anſwered I with a melancholy I could not wholly repreſs. A thouſand reaſons conſpire to make me wiſh myſelf ſettled in the country, tho' we were blocked up with ſnow and enjoyed not the ſociety of a ſingle individual out of our own little family circle for months to come.

That is a very ſingular taſte at your time of life, ſaid he. That Miſs Seymour ſhould incline to ſeclude herſelf in retirement is not merely cruel, but I had almoſt ſaid, unnatural. Shall I not even have the pleaſure of ſeeing you at the Opera before you go?

I anſwered I was afraid not, as we were to ſet off on Friday. At this moment Mrs. Hindon approaching, requeſted that he would favour her with his company to ſupper together with a ſmall party who had been ſelected.

To this he inſtantly conſented. On ſeating ourſelves at table, tho' he made an attempt to get by me, I was placed at a conſiderable diſtance, as Mrs. Hindon, out of reſpect, aſked him to ſeat himſelf at the upper end, at her right hand, and entertained him in a very earneſt half-whiſper during the repaſt.

Senſible of her imprudence, I was ſeized with apprehenſion leſt we and our ſituation were the topics on which ſhe had choſen to expatiate; which, from her extreme neglect of delicacy and entire diſregard to propriety, was not improbable, and muſt have involved us in the ſevereſt mortification. I was ſeriouſly miſerable from the inſtant this ſuſpicion occurred; and began even to dread that ſhe had been ſoliciting his aid or pleading our cauſe;—an idea that tormented me in the cruelleſt manner; for ſhe

ſhe often glanced her eye on Fanny and on me, and led Mr. Roatſley to regard us in a ſimilar manner. I am now happily relieved however from theſe fears; for when I afterwards ſounded her on the ſubject, ſhe did not betray by the ſlighteſt hint having acted ſo imprudently, nor could I gather from her diſcourſe any circumſtances to alarm me.

After ſupper I was aſked to ſing. Mr. Roatſley is paſſionately fond of muſic, and confeſſed himſelf a performer on ſeveral inſtruments. This you may believe did not diminiſh my natural timidity; but the intreaties of the company were ſo preſſing, and thoſe of Mr. and Mrs. Hindon ſo importunate, that I was conſtrained to comply, and acquitted myſelf indeed very ill.

My ſpirits, low and oppreſſed, made the little ſong of "Ah! my charmante Louiſe" affect me almoſt to tears while I ſung. How many painful recollections did it bring to my mind, when my Sophia and myſelf received our inſtructions together in that delightful accompliſhment!

I ſlept very ill laſt night. Confounded by a variety of conjectures, I knew not which implicitly to credit. From one ſource of anxiety however I conſidered it was in my power to be relieved, and any certainty was preferable to my preſent ſuſpenſe: beſides, to matrimonial intelligence entire belief is not always to be given; and as Roatſley obſerves, to what we dread we are moſt liable to give our confidence; I therefore reſolved to pay a morning viſit to Miſs Pierſon, to whom I have owed one a conſiderable time, but whoſe acquaintance indeed, till this accident, I had not much inclination to cultivate.

cultivate. At preſent however ſhe is the only channel from whence I can draw information, and her ſociety is become intereſting. I intended, with all the apparent indifference I could aſſume, to renew the ſubject of her recent intelligence, and endeavour to diſcover on what grounds ſhe had advanced the fact with ſuch apparent certainty. She was from home however when I called, and I am juſt returned not a little diſappointed.

How unlucky it is that I muſt leave town while I remain in this painful uncertainty! Yet why do I call it ſo, when but for the deluſions of a too ſanguine mind I ſhould not harbour a doubt concerning the authenticity of Miſs Pierſon's intelligence. I have formed fifty little ſchemes to meet with her; but not being able to form a pretext for calling again myſelf, I intend to make Fanny go in my place to pick up what accounts ſhe can learn reſpecting this affair.

ELEVEN AT NIGHT.

Miſs Pierſon has ſaved me the trouble of planning ſome little artifice to meet with her, by returning my viſit this very evening in an eaſy way, accompanied by Miſs Farnford.

My heart beat ſeverely at their entrance. How do circumſtances, apparently the moſt trivial, change the face of things. Two girls, whoſe acquaintance but a few days ago, from the frivolous though harmleſs inſipidity of their converſation I ſhould rather have avoided than courted, were now become the objects of my moſt anxious ſolicitude.

I was

I was in hopes, from the eagerneſs with which they had before entered on the ſubject I now wiſhed ſo much to introduce, that they might of themſelves lead to it; and one is but too apt to conclude others in ſome meaſure influenced by circumſtances that convey intereſt and agitation to our own boſoms. Miſs Farnford and her friend were ſtruck with Roatſley's elegance, and the intelligence of a wedding, intereſting to all girls, had attracted their curioſity and attention; but after the conjecture relating to jewels, ſettlements, finery, &c. were adjuſted, to which ſuch a topic generally gives birth, the idea in all probability occurred to them no more. I was therefore obliged to touch on it myſelf in the manner I imagined leaſt liable to ſuſpicion. Fortunately the penetration of my companions was not to be dreaded, and ſtill more fortunately Mr. and Mrs. Hindon were engaged abroad.

In the courſe of converſation I mentioned a catalogue of marriages as the news of the day; and tacked Mr. Roatſley's to the end of my liſt, tho' not without a glow on my cheek.

O don't you remember it was I who told you of that match, ſaid Miſs Pierſon, the other night when we were here.

I will not vouch for the authenticity of half my intelligence, ſaid I; and perhaps little more credit ought to be given to this laſt union than to many of the others.

Oh I aſk your pardon. I aſſure you Mr. Roatſley's marriage is an undoubted fact. But certainly you ought to know all about it better than any body, for I am told that he is your couſin; tho' I believe I ought to requeſt your excuſe for mentioning it, as I believe you don't wiſh it to be made public.

I never

I never heard of it till the other evening, ſaid I; and now that I recollect, you I believe was my authority.

And that I promiſe you is as good as poſſible: for Lady Mary Lawrence, who is aunt to Lady Elizabeth Sedley, and who has had the charge of her from her infancy, (Lady Mortonbury having died when her daughter was quite a child), is extremely intimate with my mother, and has frequently mentioned to her this projected alliance, which ſhe is exceedingly eager ſhould take place, as the young man is a very particular favourite with her, and ſhe deſigns I know to preſent her niece with a very valuable ſet of jewels on the occaſion, and they are actually beſpoke: tho' Lady Mary told my mother the affair was not to be concluded till Lord Belmont's return from abroad, (who has been the chief promoter of the match), and his Lordſhip is not expected till autumn; therefore the marriage is not publicly talked of by the relations on either ſide, but all the world knows of it for all that.

My doom is then fixed, ſaid I to myſelf. My authority is undoubted, and all deluſion at an end. Let me not ſink however with unpardonable weakneſs under the blow. Let me reſiſt this overwhelming regret with all my fortitude. Had it not been for the foible of a too ſuſceptible heart, all efforts had been on this account unneceſſary. Let me therefore atone to my own mind by the moſt rigorous exertions for the error I have committed, and let a name ſo fatal, ſo intereſting, be mentioned in my journal no more.

Theſe reflections, which in an inſtant paſſed through my mind, beſtowed a momentary en-

t uſiaſm

thuſiaſm that enabled me to talk with a compoſure on the ſubject for which I applauded myſelf not a little.

I make no doubt but Lady Elizabeth will be extremely happy, ſaid I, for Mr. Roatſley really ſeems to be an agreeable man.

Oh! extremely clever and agreeable certainly, cried Miſs Farnford, (who had been examining ſome work with Fanny above ſtairs, but who juſt then returned), and the handſomeſt creature I ever beheld. But I think if he is actually going to be married, the lady has reaſon to be not a little jealous, for if ever I diſcovered a man to be in love in my life, Mr. Roatſley is deeply ſo with Miſs Seymour.

I bluſhed exceſſively, but attempted to laugh it off.

Nay you need not bluſh ſo violently, cried Miſs Pierſon, for Miſs Farnford did not accuſe *you* of being in love with *him*. I give you my word however I made the ſame obſervation. During ſupper his eyes were never from you; and when you ſung, (and really you ſung divinely), I never beheld a countenance expreſs admiration and delight as his did. He ſeemed to feel every note.

My confuſion was inexpreſſible. Conſcious guilt made me extremely apprehenſive leſt it ſhould excite the notice and raillery of my two gay companions; and Fanny, inſtead of endeavouring to relieve me from my embarraſſment, had the roguery to plunge me ſtill deeper into difficulties. If muſic be the food of love, cried ſhe, Mr. Roatſley was probably dreaming of his intended during the ſong, and of courſe might be more feelingly diſpoſed to reliſh its pathetic charms than if he had been in the ſame com-

comfortable ſtate of indifference with the performer. This ſhe uttered with a moſt malicious ſmile; but fortunately the ladies were in haſte to pay other viſits, and left us ſoon after.

Adieu, my dear Sophia. I ſhall not write again till the marriage is concluded.

H. SEYMOUR.

LETTER XVI.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

HUBERT HILL, MARCH 10.

HERE we are, all ſafe and well; tho' we have had two diſmal days for travelling, and did not arrive at the end of our journey till late yeſterday evening, the roads being rendered almoſt impaſſable by a late very heavy fall of ſnow. We found a comfortable, ſnug manſion, a delightful fire, and an elegant little repaſt ready to be placed on the table, all of which we enjoyed extremely, after having been frozen ſo many hours on the road.

Dinner being over, Mr. Howard carried us through the different apartments of this ruſtic dwelling, which are fitted up with infinite taſte, though with a frugality adapted to its ſize and ſimplicity. None of the rooms are large, but chearful in the higheſt degree, and having been all newly painted, papered, &c. poſſeſs an air not only of uncommon neatneſs, but even of elegance, a property which in my opinion conſiſts in ſymmetry rather than in ſplendor.

I know

I know you will expect the particulars of the wedding: but neither romance nor incident is to be expected where ſixteen is united to forty. Fanny would allow of no forms, though Mrs. Hindon wiſhed extremely to detain us a few days, to introduce a little merriment to ſeaſon, as ſhe ſaid, the ſolemnity of the affair. But Fanny was inexorable. She would not even conſent to make a bridal appearance; but was dreſt ſimply in a travelling dreſs, being on the wing for Hubert Hill.

MARCH 11.

This morning being a clear froſt, we walked out for an hour and an half. The country around could not be ſeen to advantage, where every object was covered with ſnow; yet it appeared beautiful. The houſe is ſituated in the moſt romantic ſpot I ever beheld; fronting the ſouth weſt, on the gentle ſlope of a hill which riſes by a very gradual aſcent. A noble river, the banks of which are ſhaded with very fine old trees, runs below, within ſight of the windows; and the eminence behind, on which there is a thriving plantation, gives the little manſion a very ſnug appearance. The garden is an excellent one, and well ſtored with common fruit trees of the beſt kinds, that amply compenſate for the want of thoſe luxurious ones to be obtained only through the expenſive aid of a hot-houſe. The pleaſure ground, tho' of ſmall extent, is laid out with admirable taſte, and the little incloſures kept in ſuch good order, that I think in ſummer, Hubert Hill muſt be the moſt delightful ſpot in the world.

I am

I am ſurprized Mr. Howard ſpoke ſo faintly in its praiſe. But no doubt he wiſhed to ſurprize us in favor of our future reſidence. It is on a very ſmall ſcale indeed, and partakes more of an ornamented farm than a country ſeat; but I think the worthy owner has reaſon to be not a little vain of the improvements he has himſelf effected ſince it came into his poſſeſſion by the death of his father; an event that took place only a few years previous to his acquaintance with our family.

From the period of his ſucceſſion to Hubert Hill, till that of his leaving England, an amiable ſiſter, who died of a conſumption at the age of twenty-nine, preſided at the head of his table; and it is to her taſte and regularity that Fanny owes the comfortable and neat elegance of various conveniencies not to be expected in the houſe of a batchelor.

MARCH 19.

Nothing but continual rain or ſnow, and no poſſibility of ſtirring out of doors. We endeavour, however, to make ourſelves the more comfortable within; Fanny, who makes all the buſtle of a young miſtreſs of a family, vain of the importance of her new charge, finds continual amuſement and employment in directing all her little houſhold matters, for which ſhe really ſeems to poſſeſs a talent, tho' I ſometimes alledge that her orders are calculated rather to confuſe than adjuſt. Being diſpleaſed with the furniture of her drawing room, which is a little antique, we have ſet about a ſerious piece of work in order to fit it up with elegance. We have

have begun to work chairs and hangings in imitation of natural flowers; which, as there is ſcope given both for taſte and ingenuity, is an agreeable occupation. You know this ſort of work is a convent accompliſhment; by which means Fanny and I are adepts in it. I have likewiſe undertaken to cover the walls of the little chearful parlour with landſcapes, for which many delightful ſcenes even from its windows furniſh ample ſubject; ſo that we are provided with abundant employment for at leaſt a twelvemonth to come. Mr. Howard, who has a well choſen collection of the works of the beſt authors, both French and Engliſh, generally reads to us while we ſit at work. The evenings we divide with a little muſic, and our favourite cheſs, ſo that they never appear too long, and our life on the whole glides along in a tenor ſo ſmooth, rational and placid, that I hope in a ſhort time to enjoy it with perfect reliſh. Even at preſent I am conſcious I could no where be more happy.

MARCH 21.

This evening I received a letter from Mrs. Hindon. Oh Sophia, into what agitation has it not thrown me! Read, my dear, what that officious woman writes.

TO MISS SEYMOUR.

I have been prevented from writing you ſooner, my dear Miſs Seymour, by a ſlight fever, which though by no means alarming, proved troubleſome for a few days, and was attended by a head-ach ſo ſevere, that an application to my pen

pen has been till this day wholly impracticable; although I have been for this week paſt extremely deſirous to inform you of a piece of good fortune, the merit of which I muſt take entirely to myſelf. To give you a clear and diſtinct idea of the whole affair, I muſt begin by previouſly acquainting you, that perceiving you adhered obſtinately to your reſolution of attempting no further application to your family, a meaſure which I always freely confeſſed to you I could not but highly diſapprove of, I myſelf, out of mere friendſhip, determined upon a ſtep, the happy ſucceſs of which I am convinced muſt for once induce you to applaud my management.

As Mr. Roatſley, from his viſits and polite civility, appeared to have taken no part in the family tranſactions, I ſeized an opportunity, the evening he did us the honour of ſupping with us, to hint at the difficulties and diſtreſſing embarraſſments in which doubtleſs you muſt have found yourſelves involved, had not the marriage of the one ſiſter offered an agreeable home for both: but what was my ſurprize on finding that he liſtened to me with all the pity and aſtoniſhment of a man who was wholly unconcerned in the affair! and when, emboldened by the compaſſion he teſtified, I ventured to tell him what a ſevere diſappointment Lord Belmont's cruel behaviour had proved, he declared he had never been informed of the application, nor could he believe it poſſible he ſaid that an affair ſo melancholy and intereſting ſhould have failed of ſucceſs with his Lordſhip, whoſe heart was open to every call of diſtreſs and to every ſentiment of humanity. Theſe were Mr. Roatſley's very words. Delighted to find my auditor ſo much

more

more agreeably diſpoſed than I could have hoped for, you may believe I delayed not laying hold of this favourite moment to expatiate on the mortifying and ſevere reverſe of ſituation which but a very ſhort time ago had been all at once preſented before your eyes, by the cruel rejection of his Lordſhip, whoſe favour was now become, through the imprudence of your late guardian, ſtill more eſſential. I repreſented, in terms the moſt pathetic and moving, the ſtate of diſtreſsful poverty and dependance, to which but ſo lately it ſeemed likely you muſt both have been reduced, had not the happy and fortunate event before mentioned in part offered a relief, and I failed not to hint, in a pretty explicit manner, how uſeful and acceptable, nay how neceſſary ſome addition to your preſent finances muſt undoubtedly prove; more eſpecially as your future expectations, were they even realized to the utmoſt of your hopes, would afford but a very ſcanty ſupport, and be ſcarcely capable of beſtowing the mere neceſſaries of dreſs; while for thoſe of ſubſiſtence you was conſtrained to depend upon the limited income of your brother-in-law.

Never was man more affected than Mr. Roatſley at this recital, and he expreſſed his ſympathy in the ſtrongeſt terms. We had not however either leiſure or opportunity for diſcuſſing matters fully. But he faithfully promiſed to exert his utmoſt activity and avail himſelf of Lord Belmont's intereſt towards contributing to place you in a ſituation ſuitable to your birth and education. So eager was he in the cauſe, that he called two different times on the two ſucceeding days, with the intention no doubt of making further enquiries, and to conſult what could

could be done moſt ſpeedily and effectually for your ſervice. I was unluckily from home both times, but I think you told me you had ſeen him the day before you left town, tho' I perceived he had not choſen as yet to make his good intentions known to you; and on my part, as I doubted not but my application would turn to good account, I had determined to be ſilent on the ſubject till I could ſurprize you agreeably with the certainty of your good fortune. The morning after Mr. Roatſley again did me the honour of calling; but we were then all engaged at church on the grand affair. Having been ſo unſucceſsful, he addreſſed himſelf to me by letter the very evening after, and a very pretty letter it is, I give you my word, informing me in the genteeleſt terms, that his endeavours in behalf of my friend had been ſo happily crowned with ſucceſs, and thro' the intereſt of a certain Nobleman in power, who was the intimate friend of Lord Belmont, a penſion of two hundred per annum had been procured for Miſs Seymour, while ſhe remained unmarried.

But as I have reaſon to imagine, (ſays he, for I give you the very words of his letter), that your amiable young friend labours under preſent difficulties, will you, Madam, venture to aſſiſt me in a pious fraud which will engage my warmeſt gratitude and reſpect: your friendſhip and intimacy in all probability muſt afford you a pretext for offering Miſs Seymour that aſſiſtance which it may be improper to appear as coming from me. In anſwer to this, I immediately wrote Mr. Roatſley that I agreed moſt willingly to his generous ſcheme, and the day following received a bill for two hundred pounds, encloſed in a letter as expreſſive of gratitude and ac-

knowledgments as if I had chnferred on him the greateſt of all favours.

As a boon from ſo near a relation, probably intended as a diſcharge in full of all demands upon himſelf and his relations, I cannot ſuppoſe that even your delicacy, (over refined as I have ſometimes thought it), will object to the preſent; neither can I prevail with myſelf to take the merits of a gift, the magnificence of which, when conſidered as mine, muſt undoubtedly have awakened your ſuſpicion. Mr. Roatſley made yet another attempt to viſit me ſoon after this tranſaction, but I was confined to my bed, and had it not in my power to ſee him.

Adieu, dear Miſs Seymour! Pray accept Mr. Hindon's beſt wiſhes and mine, and preſent the ſame to my brother and his fair bride; and believe me your ſincere friend and ſervant,—

MARTHA HINDON.

Oh! Sophia! what were my emotions on reading this letter! No words can ſpeak my feelings. Though penetrated with the exertions of my amiable couſin in my favour, how ſeverely was I mortified, how deeply wounded, to find myſelf the object of his compaſſion—of his generoſity—of his pecuniary aſſiſtance. Oh! how did all the pride of my heart riſe at the humiliating idea!

Why did Mrs. Hindon preſume to interfere, without my knowledge or conſent, in an affair for which ſhe poſſeſſes the requiſites neither of judgment nor delicacy? Proud as ſhe appears of her ſucceſs, I ſhall for ever regret the buſy officiouſneſs which dictated a ſtep ſo dreadful to me to think of. Yet I fear I am unjuſt. The poor woman had certainly no apparent aim but my

my advantage in this unlucky tranſaction, and perhaps prejudice alone induces me to ſuſpect it the mere effects of her intermeddling diſpoſition, which derives its higheſt gratification from prying into the concerns of others, and is delighted to find occupation for its reſtleſs and frivolous activity.

The letter, at the firſt reading, threw me into agonies. I perceived only the mortifying point of view in which Mrs. Hindon had repreſented me to Roatſley, and that reflection poiſoned and wholly embittered the ſatisfaction which the notion of his anxiety and intereſt might otherwiſe have excited. To paint in colours the moſt pitiable and moving, ſo as to raiſe his pity and ſympathy, the ſituation to which we might have been reduced?—good Heavens! can ſhe imagine this a circumſtance from which I could derive ſatisfaction? Her repreſentation too was by no means juſt, and had not even the merit of truth to recommend it: for tho' at preſent I am conſtrained to depend upon the limited income of my brother-in-law, Mr. Howard expects that a very few weeks will in all human probability ſee Mr. Benſeley's affairs adjuſted, and two thouſand pounds at leaſt retrieved, for his wife's ſhare and mine, out of the wreck of our fortune. From the intereſt of my patrimony, ſlender as it is, in this retired abode I am certain I ſhall have not only all my neceſſary wants ſupplied, but poſſeſs the ability of making ſuch little uſeful preſents to my ſiſter, as ſhall ſecure to me my independency in my own eyes. But this is a notion which to Mrs. Hindon muſt appear the mere fiction of a romantic brain. Born an heireſs, and accuſtomed to derive that vain importance on which her heart is fixed from the poſſeſſion of wealth and an oſtentatious diſ-

play

play of grandeur, ſhe regards opulence as the firſt of human bleſſings, and its deprivation as the harbinger of the moſt acute miſery.

Of the penſion I heard with unfeigned regret. Shocked at the circumſtances which had given birth to the acquiſition, I felt it as a painful weight which depreſſed my mind, and from which to be free I would have given the world had I poſſeſſed it. But having communicated the letter to Mr. Howard, he repreſented it to me in a juſter point of view; tho' in reading it to himſelf, I obſerved that he bluſhed indignant at the unfeeling hints with which the epiſtle is interſperſed.

I ought to conſider, he ſaid, that the obligation of ſoliciting this annuity was inferior to the claims, which in my preſent ſituation juſtice alone, independent of humanity, gave me upon my relations; and that as an acquittal of the great debt owing me from their kindneſs and attention, this ſalary had doubtleſs been procured, which was evidently deſigned to extinguiſh all future expectations.

As Mr. Howard perceived however that I was vexed and aſhamed, and as yet undetermined how to act, delicacy made him forbear any other advice on the ſubject than merely that which I had at firſt ſolicited, and which naturally reſulted from reading the letter; and as my happineſs and advantage were the ſole ideas that dictated his ſentiments, he thought theſe acquirements would not readily be the production of a meaſure which even in proſpect gave birth to ſuch uneaſineſs. He therefore concluded, with a feeling peculiar to his diſpoſition, it muſt be confeſſed that our good ſiſter's notions of affluence are not the moſt romantic in the world; therefore while ſhe thought ſhe poſſeſſed the

power of procuring you what ſhe herſelf eſteems the chief good in life, and which no doubt beſtows many valuable and rational gratifications, ſhe ſcrupled not by what means the advantage was gained, tho' a little more delicacy exerted in the tranſaction had probably given it a very different aſpect to what it now wears. However ſhe meant all for the beſt, tho' it cannot be denied that to talk to her of eaſe, comfort, and compleat independence on forty or fifty pounds a year, is to preſent different ſhades of colour before eyes whoſe organs have been from infancy impaired. Indeed the happy diſpoſition that gives exiſtence to ſuch ſentiments, is beyond, infinitely beyond the reach of adverſe fortune; and is in itſelf a bleſſing which no worldly acquiſitions can confer.

By praiſe ſo delicate, Mr. Howard laboured to convince me, that however I ſhould determine, his opinion ſhould follow mine; and that if my reſolution was to give way to pique, and to reject this ſeeming compromiſe with my family, he on his part ſhould rather applaud than blame the ſpirit that induced me to refuſe a favour, which, however otherwiſe advantageous, overwhelmed me with mortification. Yet it was not difficult to diſcern, that he might be apt to conſider my rejection as an abſurdity to which falſe delicacy and offended pride alone gave riſe; and when on the other hand I coolly reflected that my finances were by no means aſcertained, that it was not quite impoſſible amidſt the chapter of accidents from which they had already ſuffered ſeverely, but that I might really one day become dependent on the worthy Mr. Howard and my ſiſter, a ſituation I could indeed but ill brook, I reſolved to conquer my reluctance,

tance, and yield to neceſſity; tho' my heart roſe againſt my judgment, and had I been alone I ſhould have indulged in tears, which indeed were not wholly reſtrained even in Mr. Howard's preſence, at ſight of the bill.

Oh! Sophia! what ſteps were to be taken here, in this moſt cruel of all circumſtances?—To return it inſtantly without doubt. But how conceal from the generous donor that I was acquainted from whence it came. Since Mrs. Hindon could not retain *his* ſecret, tho' ſo powerfully urged and intreated, how could I poſſibly flatter myſelf that ſhe would pay greater regard to mine? I had no path to purſue that had not been attempted by him without ſucceſs; however on ſome plan I was obliged ſuddenly to determine. I therefore ſat down to my bureau without loſs of time to anſwer her letter.

I thanked her in terms warmer than were my feelings, tho' I fear my coldneſs will ſurpriſe her, for the intereſt and trouble ſhe has taken in this buſineſs; but re-encloſed the bill, which I beſought her to return to the right owner, informing him that even as her gift, I could not poſſibly prevail with myſelf to accept of it.

I have aſked the favor of Mr. Howard to thank Mr. Roatſley by letter in his ſiſter's name for the intereſt he has taken in her concerns. I think I can do no leſs. An obligation may wound a proud ſpirit, but the teſtimonial of a proper gratitude cannot hurt an ingenuous one.

There is one circumſtance, material and intereſting, in Mrs. Hindon's letter, on which I have not yet touched, but which I conjecture will not paſs unnoticed even by you, and as for me, it has employed my thoughts day and night ever ſince it reached me: Roatſley, ſhe tells me,

me, appears to have been kept hitherto in utter ignorance with regard to our unlucky tranſactions with his mother, and to be wholly unacquainted with the rejected application to our grandfather. Though how particulars of ſuch importance in the family ſhould have been concealed from his knowledge it is impoſſible to conjecture. There is indeed a myſtery in this affair which Mr. Howard, Fanny, and myſelf, attempt in vain to unravel. Is it too fanciful to imagine that Lady Linroſe, fearing the known generoſity of her amiable ſon's diſpoſition might lead him to act againſt the wiſhes of Lord Belmont, may have determined on keeping him wholly in ignorance? I am bewildered in a variety of imaginary opinions, and not a little ſecretly delighted at finding myſelf enabled to exculpate him from thoſe charges of pride and duplicity, which in ſpite of a too inſinuating partiality, have ſometimes painfully recurred to my mind.

Can it be, my Sophia! that Roatſley has been ſo long ignorant, and what is equally aſtoniſhing and unaccountable, has been informed from the lips of Mrs. Hindon only, that we are ſo nearly allied by the ties of blood? Yet what are theſe ties? how weak, how inſufficient alone either to produce friendſhip or to excite eſteem or admiration! The connection is indeed productive of ſatisfaction, merely from the idea that it is a foundation for intercourſe and a pretext for intimacy. I think however, even in common politeneſs, he ought to have appeared leſs dejected than he did upon the diſcovery. His ſilence and embarraſſment during our laſt interview

view evidently confeſs what little ſatisfaction he derived from the information.

I have been reading Mrs. Hindon's letter once more; and tho' ſhock'd at the indelicacy too viſibly expreſſed in almoſt every line, now that I am cool there are ſome paſſages in it which do not wholly diſpleaſe me. How feeling, how conſiderate, how noble, has been Roatſley's conduct! His heart is indeed open to every call of diſtreſs, and to every ſentiment of compaſſion. How amiable is his delicacy compared to that of his partner in the generous tranſaction! It pains me not, nay I ſhould be gratified, to receive an obligation from my couſin, diſtinct from the ſordid and humiliating conſideration of money matters. The anxiety and trouble therefore which were exerted on this occaſion, dilate my heart and animate my gratitude. I am alone hurt that the repreſentations of my officious agent were dictated with ſo little judgment as to excite his pity, and ſo little refinement as to mortify my feelings. To this was owing the diſtreſſing and unſucceſsful attempt to wound me ſtill more ſeverely by pecuniary favours.

I have received a letter from Miſs Parſons, who promiſed at parting ſometimes to let me hear from her. She tells us that ſhe is now moſt agreeably ſettled in that line, for which ſhe regarded herſelf as beſt qualified to earn her own independent ſubſiſtence, and that ſhe is to quit Mrs. Hindon's in a few days, who has been much diſpleaſed with the ingratitude of her conduct towards ſo kind a relation: theſe are the good lady's own words.

The lady with whom ſhe was in terms, held her determination ſuſpended as I told you, on account

account of ſome point on which Miſs Parſons did not anſwer her wiſhes; but on that deſerving young woman's offering her ſervices in perſon, ſhe was ſo much pleaſed with her appearance, as to wave all deficiencies, and cloſed immediately with her terms. Pray who do you imagine this lady has turned out to be? no other than Lady Linroſe herſelf: and Miſs Parſons at this moment actually makes one of her family.

H. SEYMOUR.

LETTER XV.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

APRIL 2.

I Have been ill and unfit for writing for ſome days paſt; and tho' ſtill feeble and dejected, I haſten to that ſoothing relief which pouring our anxieties into the boſom of friendſhip ever beſtows, even in the moſt diſtreſsful ſituations.

Mr. Howard, rambling over his grounds the other evening as it began to grow duſk, perceived on the high road at the foot of the hill, a carriage and four driving with great vehemence, as if deſirous of arriving at the end of its journey before night ſhould render travelling, in the preſent ſtate of the weather, dangerous as well as uncomfortable. A period however was but too ſoon put to their career, by a moſt alarming accident: the axle-tree all at once gave way, and the coach was ſuddenly overſet with a violence which made Mr. Howard, who was at no great

great diſtance, tremble for the lives of the unfortunate travellers.

He flew inſtantly to their aſſiſtance; and found they conſiſted of a lady and her maid, attended by two footmen or horſeback, who were endeavouring to pull the unlucky Abigail out of the ſhattered equipage. This with the aid of Mr. Howard, was, tho' with difficulty, effected: but they ſoon perceived that the ſituation of the girl was infinitely leſs deplorable than the condition in which they beheld the poor lady, who lay without motion at the bottom of the coach, her head and arm cut ſeverely by the glaſſes, her face covered with blood, and apparently dead.

Having lifted her out of the coach, Mr. Howard, aſſiſted by the maid, who forgot her own ſufferings in her terror for her lady, wiped the blood from her face, endeavoured to ſtop its effuſions with her handkerchief, plentifully beſprinkled her with water, which a late fall of ſnow abundantly ſupplied on all ſides; and having adminiſtered the aid of eau de luce, ſal volatile, &c. the poor lady, to their unſpeakable joy, at length opened her eyes.

As ſoon as ſhe was ſufficiently recovered, Mr. Howard informed her that his houſe was not above a quarter of a mile from the ſpot, and that every aſſiſtance could there be ſpeedily procured to alleviate her own ſufferings and thoſe of her maid; and beſought her to allow him to help her into his own little carriage, for which he had diſpatched one of the footmen at the moment of his coming up, and which was now arrived. This conveyance was by no means ſuited to the preſent exigency, being a one horſe chair, the only equipage this family

boaſts of. In this aſſiſted by the attendants, Mr. Howard placed the unfortunate lady, and ſlowly approached the houſe.

I have brought you an unexpected gueſt, my dear, cried Mr. Howard, as he entered, ſupporting the feeble unfortunate; but would to heaven we had been introduced to the honour of her acquaintance in circumſtances leſs unhappy, for ſhe has met with a moſt alarming accident and is ſeverely hurt.

Fanny received her with that cordial kindneſs to which her ſituation ſo juſtly laid claim. The ſurgeon, who had been ſent for from the village adjoining, on examining her bruiſes declared that one of her arms was diſlocated, and that there was a fracture of one of the ſmall bones near the wriſt. The unfortunate lady immediately underwent the neceſſary operations; but the groans which her agony excited rendered us incapable of remaining near her.

At length however her acute ſufferings were over. The operator departed, having enjoined the ſtricteſt attention to quiet and reſt, and my ſiſter and I were again admitted into her apartment to ſee every thing prepared by Thereſe, her own maid being unable to attend her. We then returned to the parlour, not a little eager to be made acquainted with the name of our lovely gueſt, a point in which we ſtill remained ignorant.

Mr. Howard inſtantly gratified our curioſity; having learnt from the ſervants that their lady was the Counteſs of Aubrey, and that they were on their way to her country reſidence in the next county, when this unfortunate accident put a period for the preſent to their journey. He informed us likewiſe that he had ſent an expreſs

expreſs to Sir William Meredith, (whoſe lady was Lady Aubrey's neareſt relation, and tenderly attached to her, and who would be miſerable, the girl ſaid, if abſent from her lady at a juncture ſo critical), acquainting him with this unfortunate event, and requeſting that he and Lady Meredith would take up their reſidence at Hubert Hill till all alarm reſpecting Lady Aubrey was at an end.

This accident you may ſuppoſe, by intereſting our compaſſion ſo powerfully, had diſcompoſed us not a little, and wholly interrupted the ſocial tranquility in which our evenings are uſually ſpent.

Mr. Howard in particular was uncommonly grave, and teſtified an anxiety, which, had not the ſingular humanity of his diſpoſition been well known to me, might have created ſuſpicion. I am very apprehenſive, ſaid he, for the life of Lady Aubrey. Her delicacy of frame ſeems but ill calculated for ſuſtaining an accident of this kind, and too much caution cannot be purſued.

The conſequence too powerfully juſtified his alarm: about three in the morning I was ſuddenly awakened by Thereſe, who haſtily drew aſide my curtain. Ah! Mademoiſelle! ſaid ſhe, la pauvre dame eſt tres mal.

She then informed me that her Ladyſhip had been exceſſively unquiet all the night, and ſo low ſpirited, that apparently worn out by reſtleſſneſs and pain, ſhe at length burſt into tears; and telling Thereſe ſhe could not reſt, ordered her to bring a light into her chamber as ſhe found ſleeping impoſſible.

The girl entreated her to ſwallow a few drops in ſome water, to which ſhe conſented, and

gave

giving over all thoughts of repoſe, ſhe had her curtains drawn aſide and tried to beguile the tedious hours of midnight by entering into converſation with Thereſe; who poſſeſſes all the loquacity of her nation, and who, from encountering few of her equals to whom ſhe can talk, ſeizes with avidity every opportunity ſhe can lay hold of to indemnify herſelf for the painful penance of ſilence, by making repriſals upon thoſe who underſtand her language.

Her Ladyſhip, ſhe ſaid, had made many enquiries about my ſiſter and me, to whoſe humanity and hoſpitality ſhe often repeated ſhe owed her life; and the girl was in hopes ſhe found herſelf ſomewhat eaſier, when ſhe was ſeized all at once with a fit ſo violent and alarming, that Thereſe was obliged to call up her own maid to her aſſiſtance; and tho' ſhe is now rather more compoſed, continued ſhe, I am afraid Madame's fever is extremely high. She talks very incoherently, mutters to herſelf in a manner truly frightful, and juſt now inſiſts on riſing and being dreſſed.

This information made me haſtily get up; and unwilling to diſturb my ſiſter, who of late has been rather indiſpoſed, I threw my wrapping gown over me, and ordering Mr. Rudder, the ſurgeon, to be inſtantly ſent for, I ſtole ſoftly into Lady Aubrey's apartment, and approaching the bed, where her maid was unwillingly aſſiſting her to riſe, I enquired how ſhe found herſelf; but oh! Sophia! how ſhall I find words by which to convey to you an idea of the ſenſations which overpowered me? Is it in language to furniſh expreſſions adequate to thoſe feelings which overwhelmed my ſenſes, when the amiable, the unfortunate Lady Aubrey,

Aubrey, with a frantic violence that eluded all oppoſition, ſuddenly ſpringing from the bed, threw herſelf at my feet, and embracing my knees, exclaimed in accents which froze my blood—Oh! my Lord! my beloved Lord Linroſe! for the ſake of Heaven do not frown upon me ſo terribly. Your looks ſtab me to the ſoul! you terrify me, my Lord!——Oh! have mercy upon me!——I was dear to you once!—did you not ſay ſo?—and I have long, long forgiven you all you have made me endure.

I heard no more, but fell ſenſeleſs on the ground.

Thereſe and the woman, terrified at the unaccountable ſcene before them, flew to our aſſiſtance; and while the one ineffectually adminiſtered hartſhorn and other volatile reſtoratives to me, the other entreated her diſtracted lady to ſuffer herſelf to be again undreſt and to return to bed: and ſo quickly does inſanity change the object of its intereſt and purſuit, that, forgetting the idea which had but a moment before ſo violently agitated her boſom, ſhe allowed herſelf to be again put to bed, and yielding to weakneſs, was for ſome time tolerably ſtill and compoſed.

Finding in the mean while that I ſhewed no ſymptoms of recovery, Thereſe in terror awakened my ſiſter, who flew half-dreſſed into the room juſt as I had opened my eyes, and began to recollect my ſituation.

A ſeaſonable flood of tears in ſome meaſure relieved the anguiſh of my feelings, and allayed Fanny's apprehenſions of a relapſe; and with her aſſiſtance, I ſummoned ſtrength ſufficient to quit Lady Aubrey's chamber, where the ſound of her voice repeating in the moſt melancholy accents

accents my father's name, and breathing her ſoft and heart-breaking complaints at his cruelty and deteſtation, threw me into agonies unſpeakable.

Fanny, who was yet unacquainted with the cauſe of my agitation, and who having been merely informed that Lady Aubrey was delirious, in her anxiety on my account had not attended to the incoherencies that fell from her lips, eagerly poured upon me the moment we left it, a thouſand enquiries reſpecting the occaſion of the fit with which I had been ſeized. I was unable to ſatisfy her; and felt relieved by the entrance of Mr. Howard, whoſe countenance informed me, that to him at leaſt the taſk of diſcloſing it was unneceſſary.

For Heavens ſake, my deareſt ſiſter, compoſe yourſelf, cried Mr. Howard. The pain of this affecting incident I might have prevented, had I dreaded or foreſeen an explanation ſo diſtreſſing and abrupt: but the apprehenſion of inflicting an unneceſſary wound deterred me from an information which I was well qualified to have given the inſtant Lady Aubrey's name reached my ears.

What information? cried Fanny. You frighten me, without knowing why. I perceive this lady is one of our relations: but why ſhould the knowledge of that circumſtance wound or diſtreſs us?

If you will promiſe me, my dear, not to be too much affected ——

For Heavens ſake, tell me to what all this preparation tends?

I am juſt going to do ſo, ſaid he, taking her hand; and I hope you will not be alarmed when I deſire you to recall to mind an unfortunate lady, whoſe name frequently occurs in the packet

packet once entruſted to my care—Miſs Marſdon.

Good God! is it poſſible! Can Lady Aubrey be in fact that miſerable, that ill-fated woman? and ſubdued by a croud of melancholy ideas, Fanny melted into tears; but frightened to witneſs the ſtill ſuperior anguiſh of my feelings, ſhe forgot her own diſtreſs to ſoothe mine.

Oh! my deareſt Hermione! cried ſhe, do not give way to this agitation. You will diſtract me. Conſider, my love, that time muſt have long ſince greatly allayed Lady Aubrey's ſufferings. Thoſe of our dear, dear father, are happily lulled to perpetual reſt. He is now diſengaged from all the pains and ſorrows of the world, and this accidental rencontre ought not too ſeverely to affect us.

The apprehenſion of alarming her made me exert myſelf to aſſume a compoſure to which I could not ſo ſpeedily attain; but revolving in my mind all the circumſtances that had occurred ſince Lady Aubrey's arrival, it was not difficult for me to trace the cauſe of the melancholy delirium with which ſhe had been ſeized, nor of that ſudden burſt of grief that ſo wholly overpowered her the inſtant I was preſented to her ſight; and which, tho' it ſeemed to us the natural conſequence of depreſſion and uneaſineſs, had undoubtedly its ſource in my reſemblance to my father, which has been ever deemed ſtrikingly remarkable, and which muſt have overwhelmed her, even at the firſt moment, with ſome ſlight ſuſpicion of my being in fact one of thoſe daughters, of whoſe exiſtence I can hardly imagine ſhe has remained wholly ignorant; and her converſation with the loquacious Thereſe, a converſation poſſibly deſigned to aſcertain her

doubts,

doubts, pouring undeniable conviction on her mind at a moment of fatigue, pain, and indiſpoſition, no wonder that ſuch a conflict of emotions co-operating with her late accident, ſhould have diſordered her imagination.

Upon interrogating Thereſe more minutely, I find theſe conjectures ſtrongly corroborated. Tho' ſighs and tears, ſhe ſays, often burſt from the unfortunate invalid, her expreſſions were diſtinct, and to all appearance her reaſon clear, till after middight; when calling Thereſe to the ſide of her bed, ſhe enquired about a thouſand particulars relating to her two ladies. Were they lately arrived from abroad? In what part of the continent did they uſually reſide? Did they give into the gaieties of ——, (within ſixty miles of which place Thereſe had told her we lived), or did we prefer the retirement of the country? On all of which Thereſe was ſufficiciently communicative.

Late in the evening Lady Meredith arrived. All this day Lady Aubrey continued in the moſt dangerous way. Her fever ſeemed rather on the encreaſe, tho' already ſo violent that ſhe had not had one interval of returning recollection, but raved with unceaſing and dreadful incoherency ſince the moment of my ſudden appearance.

During this time you may eaſily judge what were my ſenſations. The weight on my ſpirits was indeed inſupportable. Regarding Lady Aubrey in the light of a woman for whom my beloved parent had ſuffered ſo much—the woman who loved and had endured ſo much for him—my heart became attached to her by a ſtrong and irreſiſtible impulſe of affection, and I could not but feel deeply intereſted in a life which was once ſo dear to him. Anxiety, and

a reſ-

pect almoſt filial, urged me to watch with eager ſedulity the turn of her fever, and to adminiſter with my own hands the preſcriptions ordered by the phyſicians who were called in to her aſſiſtance: but wholly overcome by the incoherent ravings of her delirium, no ſooner was I ſeated by her bed ſide than my feelings rendered me incapable of remaining in ſilence and compoſure, and I was obliged to fly to another apartment for the relief of weeping aloud and at liberty.

My ſiſter and Mr. Howard intreated me to ſpare myſelf the anguiſh of a ſcene ſo dreadful; but when it became inſupportable, I made my eſcape, and while I preſerved fortitude ſufficient for the taſk, I felt a ſecret idea of duty which recompenſed me for the pain of my attendance.

Sir William Meredith was prevented from accompanying his lady by a fit of the gout. Her terrors on account of her niece were indeed extreme. She wept violently on alighting, and poſſeſſed hardly reſolution ſufficient for liſtening to the particulars of her accident.

The countenance of the phyſician feelingly told how much was to be dreaded. All I can in conſcience tell you, Madam, ſaid Dr. Harding to Lady Meredith, is, that you will not remain long in the miſery of ſuſpenſe. One way or other it muſt ſoon be decided.

This day, alas! has produced no ſymptom in the leaſt favourable. Lady Aubrey continues to endure all the reſtleſs turbulence of delirium, is in continual motion, ſhifts an uneaſy poſture perpetually without finding one that beſtows more relief, and is ſometimes obliged to be detained by force from leaving her bed. She talks inceſſantly; and tho' her diſcourſe is incoherent,

rent, it is uniformly pathetic, melancholy, and intereſting. She not only recurs often to my father's name, but if I miſtake not, even Mr. Benſeley's ſome hours ago eſcaped her. The friendly part he acted in thoſe diſmal ſcenes which lie ſo heavy on her diſordered mind, renders this a natural tranſition of ideas.

APRIL 12.

After a tedious ſuſpenſe of ten days, Lady Aubrey's fever, thank Heaven, begins to give way to medicine. Doctor Harding this day pronounces his patient in a fair way of recovery. Her recollection is perfectly reſtored, the violence of her fever is abated, and ſhe is now ſenſible of her aunt's attendance, who leaves not her chamber either day or night, having a ſmall field bed placed in the room, wherein ſhe has taken what little repoſe the perturbation and anxiety of her ſpirits allowed.

This interval has been a period of real anguiſh to me. All the horrors of my father's ſufferings and misfortunes, this wonderful and unexpected incident has renewed in my mind with augmented poignancy; and that gloomy impreſſion which the ſoothing hand of time, the habit of frequent reflection, and the conſideration of his tranſition, I truſt, to a happier world, had in ſome meaſure effaced, this accidental meeting has reſtored with redoubled violence, attended if poſſible with encreaſed depreſſion.

Mr. Howard and Fanny having inſiſted on my relinquiſhing an attendance which the preſence of Lady Meredith rendered unneceſſary, and which, ignorant of the ſecret and ſingular

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tie that binds my heart to that of the unfortunate Lady Aubrey, might be deemed officious by her aunt, I have ſtrictly forborn ever ſince her arrival to enter the apartment; and ſo powerfully has my ſenſibility ſtrengthened by this forbearance, that had my aſſiſtance been required, I ſcarce think I could have ſummoned reſolution ſufficient for encountering the hazard of again hearing my father's name pronounced in the heart-rending accents of the mournful invalid. Even now, that her reaſon and recollection, through the mercy of Heaven, are reſtored, I look forward with inexpreſſible apprehenſion to the idea of once more meeting her eyes. The pang this interview muſt occaſion to her boſom, the pain with which it muſt overwhelm mine even in anticipation, agitates me beyond expreſſion.

APRIL 17.

Lady Aubrey is much better. She now merely retains that languor and depreſſion which indiſpoſition, independent of dejection, invariably leaves behind as a memento of its power.

Lady Meredith, who is a moſt amiable and agreeable woman, now happily delivered from the painful anxiety that oppreſſed her, gives us at times, when ſhe can be ſpared from her attendance on her niece, a good deal of her company, and expreſſes in the warmeſt terms her gratitude for our attention to Lady Aubrey.

APRIL 20.

As yet Lady Aubrey, who is now able to ſit up, or rather to recline on the ſopha for ſome hours

hours every day, has expreſſed no deſire for an interview with either my ſiſter or myſelf, and the longer this meeting is delayed, the more formidable it appears. It is but too probable, indeed, that ſhe views it with equal apprehenſion, and willingly lays hold of the pretence of indiſpoſition to defer a conference which muſt be productive of ſo much pain and embarraſſment to all parties.

I think it not unlikely, that perceiving the obſcurity that is thrown over our ſituation, the borrowed name we have aſſumed, the retirement in which we live, and the total alienation which has taken place between us and my uncle's family, ſhe may be led to conclude our real rank in life a ſecret even to ourſelves, or at leaſt may be induced to ſuſpect that the circumſtances of our birth are but partially known to us; thoſe particulars eſpecially in which ſhe herſelf is immediately concerned, ſhe may naturally conjecture the leaſt liable of any to have reached our ears. In this caſe, as all explanation upon our meeting is out of the queſtion, part of the awkwardneſs of the ſcene will be avoided, and I am labouring to think of it with a compoſure that ſhall enable me, when it takes place, to behave with the calm indifference of an unconcerned perſon.

APRIL 25.

Laſt night Lady Meredith delivered to us a meſſage from Lady Aubrey, intimating that her Ladyſhip had been for ſome days paſt beyond meaſure anxious to return us perſonally her grateful acknowledgments for that benevolent hoſ-

hoſpitality to which ſhe had been ſo infinitely indebted; but that the weak ſtate of her nerves rendering her liable to be ſeized with agitation, and diſcompoſed by the moſt trifling occurrences, Lady Meredith had perſuaded her into compliance with the injunctions of her phyſicians, which were on no account to hazard any riſk of being diſordered or diſturbed in her preſent feeble condition; finding herſelf now, however, much recruited both in ſtrength and ſpirits, ſhe hoped in a day or two to be well enough to aſk the favour of a viſit from us in her dreſſing room, and in the mean while recommended herſelf, with many kind and polite expreſſions, to our good wiſhes.

APRIL 28.

This formidable interview is at laſt over. Oh, Sophia! I did not imagine it more formidable than it proved.

This morning Lady Meredith came down to the parlour, for ſhe ſeldom gratifies us with her company till dinner, and requeſted, in Lady Aubrey's name, the favour of my ſiſter's company and mine above ſtairs. My heart beat violently at this meſſage. I felt myſelf change colour; and involuntarily ſat down on the firſt chair ſo evidently diſcompoſed, that Lady Meredith concluded I was ill, and ſaid with much kindneſs, 'tis unfortunate, my dear Miſs Seymour, that I would not be prevailed with to accept of your moſt obliging offer of ſharing my fatigue and attendance upon my niece, for I ſhould have undoubtedly ſuſpected that you had ſuffered for your humanity. I am certain you

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are indiſpoſed. Pray allow me to feel your pulſe; for you muſt know I am reckoned an able phyſician by the poor people around our ſeat in the country. You are feverish I am convinced, and muſt nurſe yourſelf for a day or two.

I aſſured her I was perfectly well; but ſhe would not give immediate credit to my aſſertion, and entreated my ſiſter to prevail with me to allow of the phyſician's attendance. Finding however that we both made light of the propoſal, ſhe left us to prepare her niece for our appearance, who was ſo feeble and exhauſted, that a trifle ſhe ſaid diſcompoſed her ſpirits, and threw her into a tremor.

Alas! Sophia, this interview, though a circumſtance of no moment in the eyes of Lady Meredith, was by no means a trifle to the unfortunate Lady Aubrey; and ſo wholly did the proſpect of it overpower her feelings, that her aunt returned to us in a few minutes with an apology and requeſt that we would be ſo kind as to defer our viſit till the evening, as ſhe found herſelf languid and oppreſſed, and meant to lie down for an hour or two.

I felt relieved by this ſhort reſpite; and in the mean while endeavoured to prepare myſelf for the approaching period with a compoſure that might wholly confute any ſuſpicions ſhe might entertain of my being conſcious of the intereſting and melancholy events that form a connexion ſo ſingular between us. As for my ſiſter, her emotions, naturally leſs uncontroulable, at leaſt after the firſt moments of agitation, I was under no apprehenſion that ſhe would betray herſelf; and by preſerving if poſſible an air of ſerenity myſelf, I hoped to render this meeting

meeting leſs affecting to Lady Aubrey, who by that means would be ſpared the painful reflections which our mutual perturbation might otherwiſe occaſion.

In the evening, Lady Meredith returned again into the parlour. I am come once more, ſaid ſhe, to aſk the favour of your company in Lady Aubrey's dreſſing-room. She is by no means well to-day; and I am ſo apprehenſive of a relapſe, that I would have perſuaded her to defer your viſit till to-morrow, and go to reſt early; but her heart is ſo bent upon the pleaſure of ſeeing you, that I fear oppoſition would prove more hurtful than the flutter of ſpirits which the ſight of a new face in the preſent weak ſtate of her nerves may occaſion. I however ſhall remain below, and enjoy a tete-a-tete with Mr. Howard, that we may not prove too many at once for her.

We accordingly went up ſtairs. The dreſſing-room windows had been darkened with blinds, under pretence that the light was offenſive, but doubtleſs with the intention of concealing an emotion for which the inadequate allegation of debilitude and recent indiſpoſition only could be given. Lovely even in ſickneſs, ſhe reclined on a ſopha; from which, the moment we appeared, ſhe made a feeble attempt to riſe; but finding herſelf incapable of effecting it, ſhe fell back in evident diſcompoſure, and holding out a hand to each, burſt into tears.

All my reſolution forſook me at this moment. Beholding her the victim of thoſe calamities which had wholly embittered the declining days of my father—calamities which ſhe ſtill lived to deplore, and evidently felt at that inſtant with all the agony of recent and bitter diſappointment,

ment, my heart melted with ſympathetic ſorrow, and forgetting the compoſure I had laboured to obtain, I preſſed her offered hand to my lips with an enthuſiaſtic fervour which told as plainly as words could have done, that I partook in the griefs that oppreſſed her diſconſolate boſom. This language was indeed too expreſſive not to be inſtantly comprehended, for raiſing herſelf by a ſudden effort, ſhe claſped me in her arms, and ſupporting her head on my ſhoulder, ſobbed aloud.

Terrified at the violence of her emotions, I would have broke from her to have called Lady Meredith; but redoubling her careſſes, do not leave me, cried ſhe the moment ſhe could articulate—tears are habitual to me, and thoſe I ſhed at this moment are produced by ſenſations which have not often, alas! found entrance into my heart. Let not this agitation frighten you, added ſhe. It's vehemence will in time abate. The Almighty, I truſt, ſends you to me for my conſolation and ſupport. She was unable to proceed; but diſengaging herſelf from my embraces, ſhe ſtretched out her arms to Fanny, who flew into them drowned in tears.

For Heavens ſake, deareſt Madam, cried ſhe, for I was unable to ſpeak, endeavour to compoſe yourſelf; for your own ſake and for ours try to be calm. Many, many days of happineſs are yet I hope in ſtore for us all. Your friendſhip and affection is alone able to conſtitute our felicity; and it will be the delight of our lives, if you will honour us ſo far as to flatter us with the hopes of being enabled, from the ſolicitude of the tendereſt regard and moſt filial affection, in ſome ſlight degree to contribute to your's.

Alarmed

Alarmed for the conſequences of this ſcene, and afraid leſt the frankneſs of Fanny's diſpoſition ſhould lead her in the height of her emotions to touch on particulars much too delicate for the preſent moment, I ran to the door to call Lady Meredith, whoſe preſence I imagined would put a period to a converſation that was about to become much too intereſting to all parties, and which in the precarious ſtate of Lady Aubrey's health, might prove exceedingly hurtful to a frame ſo infinitely delicate; but perceiving my intention, ſhe entreated me to ſit down by her, and having ſwallowed ſome drops in water, ſhe became ſomewhat more compoſed.

I truſt in Heaven, ſaid ſhe, again taking my hand and obliging Fanny to ſeat herſelf upon the ſopha, that there are days of returning peace yet in ſtore for me, ſince the Almighty has been pleaſed in his gracious providence to vouchſafe me, by means ſo unexpected and extraordinary, the gratification of that eager wiſh, in which have been centered all my hopes and expectations of ſatisfaction on this ſide the grave; for know, my amiable young friends, continued ſhe in accents interrupted by tears, that you have been ever ſince—(her voice failed her), ever ſince my return to England, the ſubject of my thoughts —of my very dreams—and the unceaſing ſource of my anxious but ineffectual purſuit. Poor Mr. Benſeley! He was the firm and unalterable friend of both. His ſteady and inflexible attachment no circumſtances could change, no reverſes could ſhake, while he remained convinced, continued ſhe, claſping her hands together with an energy the moſt affecting, that there ſtill lay concealed within the ſecret receſs of the heart, a hidden and obſcured, yet fer-

vent ſentiment of virtue, which called for the ſoothing hand of friendſhip to guard it from diſtraction and deſpair.

You will not wonder, Sophia, that the concluſion of this ſpeech, by overwhelming me with the complicated ſenſations of aſtoniſhment, admiration, ſorrow, and delight, ſhould wholly overpower my feelings. Utterance was denied me: yet words, had I been able to command them, could have but feebly expreſſed the tumult of contending emotions that agitated my boſom. Throwing myſelf on my knees before the injured Lady Aubrey, I diſſolved into tears; and while I kiſſed her hand and preſſed it to my heart, my looks and my diſtreſs told her how much I venerated and admired her. Oh, Sophia! had you beheld the lovely unfortunate at that moment, you muſt have adored her.

She embraced me with the tendereſt emotion; and I then reiterated my entreaties that ſhe would allow us to leave her. But while ſhe detained me feebly by the hand, ſhe requeſted Fanny to remove the blinds, which now almoſt wholly obſcured the declining rays of the evening, and fixing her eyes ſteadily for an inſtant on my face, tears again began to flow, and ſighing with an expreſſion the moſt mournful, ſhe bade us good night. You may conclude that my ſiſter and I could not ſpeedily recover the appearance of compoſure. Yet, affecting as this interview had proved, a mixture of ſomewhat ſoothing and conſolatory has inſinuated itſelf amidſt the bitterneſs of more poignant ſenſations. By a wonderful interpoſition of Providence, we had been introduced to the knowledge of one of the moſt amiable of her ſex, who not only felt inclined to accord us her friendſhip and affection,

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but who was already our friend, who returned with fervor the warm attachment our hearts had imbibed almoſt the firſt moment that ſhe was preſented to our view, and the bitter recollection of whoſe paſt calamities our aſſiduous attention might prove the fortunate means of ſoothing into tranquillity. Theſe reflections were of the moſt pleaſing nature, and grateful to our hearts; yet were they but ill calculated for wiping the tears from our eyes: on the contrary, by melting every ſenſation into tenderneſs, we were almoſt exhauſted with weeping, when Mr. Howard came to ſeek us in my dreſſing-room, where he had taken refuge in hopes of acquiring that compoſure which our tete-a-tete had baniſhed ſtill further than ever from our minds.

He kiſſed a hand of each, and telling us that ſupper waited, and that Lady Meredith was already in the parlour, we tried to aſſume ſmiling faces, and deferring any account of our affecting interview till a more convenient opportunity, accompanied him down ſtairs.

On our entrance, and during ſupper, Lady Meredith's countenance betrayed an expreſſion of grave reſerve ſo different from the frank and open familiarity of manner which, ſince the relief of her anxiety, had ſeemed the characteriſtic of her mind, that I inſtantly perceived ſhe had been but recently informed of particulars, which probably the agitation of Lady Aubrey's ſpirits had diſcovered to her only an hour or two before. Painful as it was both to witneſs this change and to ſuſpect the cauſe, I made large allowances for the prejudice which induced her to regard us with repugnance. That Lady Meredith ſhould behold with diſguſt, the offspring of him whoſe name in all probability ſhe merely

knew as the ſource of miſery to her beloved niece, and with whoſe ſubſequent agonies of remorſe ſhe may be wholly ignorant, is not ſurprizing, when ſuch conſiderations have had power to outweigh in the ſcale of paternal affection every motive of humanity, compaſſion, and even duty. Yes, Sophia, even duty: for rigid as Lord Belmont's ſenſe of integrity is reported to be, in regard to us, a miſtaken notion of honour ſways his conduct. It is for minds like the angelic Lady Aubrey's alone to prove ſuperior to ſuch ſentiments, to wave perſonal injuries, to diſcard private reſentment, and to forget her own feelings and ſufferings in her pity and affection for the penitent author of her calamities.

As Mr. Howard during ſupper had converſed on indifferent ſubjects, and Lady Meredith with an air of unuſual ceremony ſeemed determined to follow his lead, the mortifying coldneſs of her manner deterred me from finding courage to aſk how Lady Aubrey found herſelf, and indeed I dreaded truſting my voice with the enquiry. However when the ſervants had retired, Mr. Howard ſaved me the trouble.

My niece tells me ſhe is no worſe, anſwered ſhe coldly; but ſhe is extremely low ſpirited; and the ſlighteſt agitation in her preſent weak condition may be fatal to a frame ſo exhauſted as her's. I own I am under great uneaſineſs about her: the apprehenſion of a relapſe terrifies me.

A relapſe! cried I in a tone which betrayed my emotion, Heaven forbid! or we ſhall never forgive ourſelves; and leaning my head upon my hand, I found myſelf unable longer to preſerve the appearance of the tranquillity I had endeavoured to aſſume.

Mr.

Mr. Howard made me ſwallow a ſecond glaſs of Madeira; and Lady Meredith ſeemed ſo affected with my tears, that preſſing my hand with even more than her accuſtomed kindneſs, all coldneſs, prejudice, and reſerve, ſeemed inſtantly to give way to the kindeſt ſympathy and moſt ſoothing compaſſion. Compoſe yourſelf, my dear Miſs Seymour, cried ſhe; my apprehenſions have been always accuſed of greatly magnifying every impending danger. It is apprehenſion only, thank God, that leads me to ſpeak in a tone of ſuch deſpondency. Lady Aubrey aſſures me, that far from being hurt by the late interview, it has ſoothed and gratified her heart; and even had the violence of her feelings, naturally acute, exhauſted her a little for the preſent, from the kindred ſenſibility of your ſympathetic hearts, I foreſee in future infinite ſatisfaction and conſolation to my unfortunate niece in the unexpected happineſs of your friendſhip and ſociety.

The ſubject was too delicate to admit of more, and ſoon after we ſeparated for the night.

This morning, when we met at breakfaſt, Lady Meredith paid us her compliments with much kindneſs, and the appearance of revived ſpirits. Her niece, ſhe ſaid, her beloved niece, (for ſhe ſeldom mentions her without ſome epithet expreſſive of affection), had enjoyed an excellent night's reſt, and found herſelf much refreſhed, ſo I hope in God, Miſs Seymour, all our fears were wholly groundleſs.

On her Ladyſhip leaving us immediately after breakfaſt, Mr. Howard informed us that he had had a long walk with her in the morning, for ſhe is an early riſer, and that it had been productive of a very intereſting converſation; in the

the courſe of which he had picked up ſome particulars relative to Lady Aubrey, that he was certain we muſt be eager to learn.

Lady Meredith, he ſaid, had entirely contradicted the report, ſo univerſally circulated and ſo generally credited, of Lady Aubrey's inſanity. A fever of the moſt alarming nature had indeed attacked her brain, and held her life for many weeks ſuſpended; but this was the natural conſequence of her misfortunes. Returning reaſon had been the immediate follower of recruited health: and tho' the moſt mournful depreſſion had wholly baniſhed tranquillity and peace from her boſom, religion the moſt devout, and reſignation the moſt humble and ſincere, had ſupported her in the height of miſery, and had preſerved her from the baneful effects of diſtraction and deſpair.

When her ill fated marriage took place, ſhe had been but a few weeks in England. She had ſpent her life abroad, where Lord Embdon had acted at the Court of Turin in a public capacity. She had hitherto enjoyed little perſonal intercourſe with her numerous relations, and was particularly attached to none of them. Her native country, endeared to her neither by the force of private friendſhip nor by the inſinuating remembrance of early prepoſſeſſion, it was the inevitable and natural effects of her misfortunes to be diſguſted with it, and her departure was a ſtep which delicacy, pride, and affliction, all conſpired to dictate.

The death of Lord Embdon, which happened at this juncture, (a ſtroke which it is to be hoped his weakly conſtitution rather than his child's calamities had inflicted,) involved the unfortunate daughter in accumulated diſtreſs. Thank heaven he died of a complaint wherein the

the ſpirits are not ſuppoſed by medical people to influence the diſorder. He had been for many years afflicted with the ſtone; and refuſing to ſubmit to an operation, fell a ſacrifice to that painful diſeaſe.

This event, while it diſſolved her only remaining tie to England, left her wholly at liberty to purſue her intended ſcheme of future ſecluſion. Her grandfather, the old Earl of Aubrey, indeed ſtill ſurvived, and beheld the ruined peace of his family with the weeping eye of a parent. He entreated his grand daughter, the heireſs of his poſſeſſions, not to deſert him in his old age; but as ſhe well knew that an hereditary regard for the ſucceſſor of his name and titles alone dictated this requeſt, and that wholly governed by a woman who had lived with him for years, his heart but feebly retained the impreſſions of natural affection, her ſenſe of duty did not interfere with the proſecution of her intentions.

She therefore bade adieu to England; and having for a ſhort time boarded herſelf and her attendants in the quiet retirement of a monaſtery, ſhe from thence enquired after an obſcure but elegant retreat, which an early and tender friendſhip for its deceaſed poſſeſſor had endeared to her remembrance; and having purchaſed it from the preſent owner, ſhe retired thither with the deſign of ſecluding herſelf for ever from the world.

When this reſolution was formed, Miſs Marſdon was but eighteen, and poſſeſſed in the full glow of radiance thoſe charms which dejection, diſappointment, and indiſpoſition, for fifteen years more, have ſcarce been able to impair. Her days, bounded by diſtreſs, the drea-

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ry proſpect admitted no ray of reviving conſolation except what reſulted from the ſociety of one dear and maternal friend, who having been lately deprived of the huſband of her heart, and never having been bleſſed with offspring, flew to indulge with her favorite young friend the unbounded luxury of ſorrow.

Madame de St. Hillaire, for ſome time combated not the intended ſecluſion of her amiable friend. But the violence of her own diſtreſs yielding to reſignation and compoſure, ſhe became conſcious that tho' grief is ſeldom abated by reaſoning the moſt convincing and judicious, time will infallibly leſſen, and variety in ſome meaſure divert, its bitterneſs. Her feelings, tho' poignant, were ſoothing and enthuſiaſtic: tears unceaſingly fell from her eyes; but they were tears of relief. Some pleaſing recollection, ſome ſcene, intereſting and endearing, often made them flow, and the luxuriant reveries of paſt delight in a great meaſure ſoothed the preſent ſad reverſe.

Far otherwiſe was the ſource of the bitter anguiſh of her friend. The remembrance of paſt affection carried a ſting which made her in horror fly from the thought; and the idea that the man ſhe had loved and had loſt was torn from her arms by the common ſtroke of death, ſupported not her feeling mind in the height of languor and depreſſion: all was miſery unmitigated: the paſt was horror, and the future preſented only undeſerved mortification and perpetual regret.

In ſolitude and obſcurity were centered the only ideas of dejected tranquillity that could find entrance into the boſom of the fair mourner: a boſom of acute ſenſibility, chilled by the cold

cold hand of diſappointment: but her anxious friend, reflecting on her youth and amiable diſpoſition, hoped that after time had been given for meliorating her ſorrows into peaceful reſignation, a temper ſo calculated for the active duties of benevolence would not remain unſubdued by the heartfelt gratifications which that noble principle affords, and foreſaw that it would not prove impoſſible to prevail with her to relax in her preſent ſyſtem.

Time juſtified the predictions of this valuable friend. By degrees, at her earneſt entreaties, a ſelect acquaintance was admitted; and altho' through the whole of Lady Aubrey's reſidence abroad, till the preſent moment, a weight of melancholy impaired her health and clouded her ſpirits, religion and principle co-operating with the continual efforts of Madame de St. Hillaire, greatly ſoftened the firſt anguiſh of her ſufferings; and while ſhe remained incapable of participating in the gaieties of life, its rational comforts were reſtored to her reliſh. Her ſociety, tho' limited, was elegant, and judiciouſly choſen; and her ſolitary reſidence at length began to wear the aſpect of a peaceful retirement, which the ſad ſtroke of Madame de St. Hillaire' death, added to the dying requeſt of her grandfather, would probably alone have prevailed with Lady Aubrey ever to have quitted.

Lord Aubrey, finding the infirmities of age overtake him with a haſty pace, the beginning of this year ſent an earneſt intreaty to his grand daughter to grant him the ſatisfaction of beholding once more the laſt and only ſupporter of his family and dignities. She heſitated not to obey, however painfully her return to England muſt awaken every ſource of anguiſh, and

arrived in London about the end of January, juſt in time to receive his laſt injunctions, the old Lord having ſurvived this affecting meeting only a few days.

Lady Aubrey now found herſelf poſſeſſed of the accumulated wealth of a long line of noble and opulent anceſtry. Independent of thoſe eſtates which from entail were annexed to the title, her grandfather had left her conſiderable property; and he requeſted that a due regard to an ancient and honourable family, of which ſhe was the head and ornament, might prevail with her to ſpend her days in the old family caſtle; where her predeceſſors had lived time immemorial, adored by their vaſſals, reſpected by their friends, and the pride and bleſſing of the country around.

In addition to theſe particulars, Lady Meredith mentioned to Mr. Howard, that though from ſeveral circumſtances which on recollection ſtrike her remembrance, ſhe conjectures her amiable niece wiſhed her to be made acquainted with the ſingular event of her rencontre with this family, never could ſhe ſummon courage and calmneſs ſufficient for entering on the painful ſubject till yeſterday evening, when the violence of her emotions rendering her aunt at once ſuſpicious and inquiſitive, drew the formidable ſecret from her boſom.

Tho' tenderly attached to my niece, ſaid Lady Meredith, the only ſurviving child of a deceaſed ſiſter whom I almoſt idolized, I have not had the happineſs, till her late return from abroad, of enjoying much of her company. She has ſpent great part of her life on the continent, where it was only in my power to viſit her once for a few months; and it is only of late, that ſtrict intimacy and affection have taken

place

place which always indeed ſubſiſted, but in a leſs powerful degree, between us. Length of abſence, and difference of years, have however precluded that unreſerved confidence, which, except at the open and undiſguiſed period of early youth, is not eaſily beſtowed. Aware of the quick ſenſibility of Lady Aubrey's feelings, I forbore to probe wounds ſcarce cloſed, and carefully avoided every ſubject likely to recall the paſt to her mind: till laſt night, when the emotion in which I found her paved the way for a communication as unexpected as extraordinary. Lady Aubrey confeſſed that accident had introduced to her knowledge a family, to meet with whom had been her moſt earneſt wiſh, tho' from a variety of circumſtances ſhe had for ever deſpaired of enjoying that ſatisfaction; and that altho' a complication of agitating ſenſations had wholly overpowered her at the firſt mee ing, and rendered her ſo apprehenſive of a ſecond as to delay it till returning health and ſtrength might enable her to ſupport the feelings which ſhe knew it muſt occaſion, the inherent ſatisfaction reſulting from the event ſhe was convinced would be of infinite benefit both to her health and tranquility in future.

It was not difficult, continued Lady Meredith, to divine who this family muſt be: and what I have ſeen of every individual in it, perſuades me that Lady Aubrey will not find herſelf deceived in this flattering expectation.

Mr. Howard had juſt concluded this intereſting narrative, when Lady Meredith entering the parlour, told us that Lady Aubrey requeſted our company; and that while we attended her Ladyſhip ſhe ſhould accompany Mr. Howard once more in his rambles thro' the wood, as it

was

was impoſſible ever to tire in walking over ſo delightful a ſpot as Hubert Hill, and ſhe had not yet been ſhewn all the lions.

My ſiſter and I then went up ſtairs. We found our dear Lady Aubrey in bed, for ſhe is not allowed to riſe till the morning is far advanced; but ſhe looked more beautiful as ſhe ſat upright ſupported by pillows, than any other woman I ever beheld in all the pride of youth, dreſs, and lovelineſs.

There is an expreſſion of feeling languor in her charming eyes, that would be alone captivating beyond expreſſion, even diveſted of the aid they receive from the perfection of her other features, and I am not certain if it would be in my power to admire her ſo enthuſiaſtically was ſhe relieved from thoſe traces of decay, which, betraying the ravages of latent anguiſh, beſpeak in the ſame moment the warmeſt admiration and the moſt compaſſionate ſympathy. In the bloom of eighteen, Miſs Marſdon may have been more beautiful, but could not have proved ſo intereſting, ſo inſinuating as Lady Aubrey appears at this inſtant.

She embraced us both tenderly, and apologized for requeſting our company at her bedſide; but I cannot deny myſelf, ſaid ſhe, the gratification of your company from mere motives of cold ceremony, while my heart is under the influence of ſentiments ſo fervent. I am ſoothed and gratified beyond expreſſion, continued ſhe. My reſt laſt night was more refreſhing and tranquil than any I have enjoyed ſince my accident, which, far from accounting unfortunate, I ſhall ever regard as the bleſſing of Providence. With a heart overflowing with gratitude to the Almighty, I offered up my humble

ble thanks, and compoſed myſelf to ſleep with an inward ſenſation of relief and ſatisfaction, which caſt a gleam of contentment even over my dreams and my repoſe.

She appeared indeed calm and compoſed beyond our moſt ſanguine hopes; and tho' a tear of feeling often fell from her eye, and her boſom heaved with an oppreſſion not to be ſuppreſſed, a ſmile of reſigned benevolence often broke thro' the ſedate melancholy ſeated on her intereſting countenance, and her ſighs ſeemed more the offspring of relief than uneaſineſs.

Amidſt the effuſions of that melting and ſoothing tenderneſs which linked our hearts together, and which was tacitly acknowledged to have but one common ſource in my dear father, yet was his name not once pronounced. Amidſt the free and mutual communication which a heart-felt intereſt claimed, tho' to this every circumſtance alluded, and every enquiry tended, it was a point at which none of us could arrive. It ſeemed too ſacred, too awful to be uttered, and muſt have led to particulars at which for worlds we would not as yet have ventured to hint.

Lady Aubrey, however, by degrees informed us all we were moſt anxious to know: that during the whole period of our reſidence abroad, ſhe had maintained a conſtant correſpondence with Mr. Benſeley, unknown to every one, and under promiſe of profound ſecrecy. Doubtleſs the appearance of preſerving an intercourſe of any kind with the avowed friend of my father, muſt have ſeemed an act of impropriety in the eyes of her own family, and might have been deemed romantic by the world; yet could not this amiable, this angelic woman,

remain

remain contentedly ignorant of the fate of a man to whom her whole heart had once been given up, however unworthy he had proved himſelf by overwhelming her with unmerited ſhame and deſpair, and by driving her, in the gay ſeaſon of a youth which fortune and nature had conſpired to bleſs with a thouſand envied advantages, to bury herſelf in ſolitude and obſcurity.

The deſire of addreſſing myſelf to Mr. Benſeley, ſaid Lady Aubrey, had taken poſſeſſion of my mind for ſeveral months previous to my quitting England. From him only could a thouſand circumſtances reach my knowledge, which it was abſolutely eſſential to my very exiſtence to know, and which to no other perſon could even be hinted; yet a number of objections, and difficulties almoſt inſurmountable, deterred me from gratifying a wiſh that every moment grew more irreſiſtible. The awkwardneſs of an application by letter appeared formidable, and the apprehenſion of being detected in a ſtep which I well knew my father would deem derogatory to my dignity, and fraught with impropriety, terrified me. This laſt bar was, alas! but too ſoon removed by that dear parent's death; and yielding to the potency of my anxiety, I ventured at length to write to Mr. Benſeley, and informing him of my reſidence abroad, where I meant immediately to retire, requeſted the favour from time to time of hearing from him.

By his anſwer I was relieved from much miſery, and ſpared the anguiſh of vague and fruitleſs conjecture. I was made acquainted with a thouſand particulars, minute and intereſting: I was ſatisfied in the point neareſt my heart,

heart—the point indeed which had dictated my ungovernable and eager deſire of information. I was informed of your ſecluded reſidence in the ſouth of France, and my fervent and inceſſant prayers to Heaven were at length anſwered:—remorſe, the moſt poignant, ſucceeded to errors which——

She ſtopped for a moment, unable to proceed; but recovering herſelf—during this correſpondence, continued ſhe, which regularly ſubſiſted between Mr. Benſeley and myſelf till within a fortnight of his death, I was minutely informed, according to my moſt earneſt requeſt, of every particular of your manner of life, your ſolitude, your amuſements, and the plan of education that had been adopted. All, all was intereſting to me; and this ſingular participation in your welfare gave an intereſt to my exiſtence; and while I deplored the bar that for ever excluded all perſonal knowledge or intercourſe between us, my heart ſtrongly cheriſhed and imbibed a warm and maternal affection, which was daily nouriſhed and encreaſed by the peruſal of letters from B——, with which the worthy Mr. Benſeley, indulgent to my ſecret wiſhes, tho' not to my avowed requeſt, often favoured me. Theſe letters, dated from your ſolitary abode in Languedoc, written with all the enthuſiaſm of paternal admiration and affection, repeated with unwearied delight the virtues, the talents, and accompliſhments of his amiable daughters; and though merely deſigned for the friendly eye of Mr. Benſeley, were faithfully in ſecret tranſmitted to me. The returning conſolation of theſe epiſtles, indicated thro' the means of his beloved children, to ſpirits worn out by agonizing repentance and remorſe, began at length

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to afford comfort to mine, and bleſſing Heaven for having touched a heart, where virtue, tho' obſcured, never was eradicated. I in my diſtant ſecluſion partook of his revived, though dejected tranquillity, and bending with due humility under the juſt and aweful diſpenſations of Providence, ſtrove with augmented fortitude to ſubmit to evils to which it had pleaſed Heaven to grant ſome alleviation.

In this way many years rolled on: in compliance with the earneſt entreaties of a friend, who partook of my retirement, and ſhared my ſorrows, I conſented to admit the ſociety of a few choſen acquaintances, and at length began to experience the calm tranquillity, which, where religion poſſeſſes a due influence over a mind unburthened with the acute ſenſations of ſelf-reproach, humility, and ſubmiſſion always in ſome meaſure reſtore: yet ſtill the ſource, after Heaven, from whence my chief comfort flowed, was the frequent and intereſting intelligence which Mr. Benſeley's letters, encloſing others from the quiet retreat at B——, often afforded me; till in October laſt, when a packet from my good friend, which had been anxiouſly expected for an unuſual length of time, was put into my hands. The ſeal announced fatal news, and my heart with ſecret apprehenſions died within me.

Though the moſt romantic flight of imagination, continued this amiable woman, ſighing with a bitterneſs that ſeemed to rend her boſom, never flattered me with the poſſibility of more than merely knowing he lived, and the moſt miraculous fluctuation of human events could grant me nothing beyond what I at preſent enjoyed——the cold ſatisfaction of peruſing letters,

ters, neither addreſſed to myſelf nor intended for my view; though the hand of death could ſcarce place a bar more unſurmountable between us than that which already ſubſiſted; yet to be told that death itſelf had divided us, overpowered me with a pang yet unfelt, the violence of which appeared aſtoniſhing even to myſelf.

Between thoſe calamities, however, with which, by the common lot of mortality, we are overwhelmed, and thoſe which a chequered ſeries of diſmal and ſingular events have produced, a material difference muſt ever be felt. The lenient quality that time ſo powerfully poſſeſſes, in mitigating the aſperities of the former, proves wholly ineffectual in thoſe afflictions which diſappointed affection or early mortifications have inflicted; and I confeſs this wound, though in the firſt moments of ſorrow not inferior perhaps to any I had endured, reaſon and reflection much more ſpeedily allayed; unlike the corroding ſting which the memory of my former miſeries perpetually renewed, a ſoothing and not unpleaſing regret now reſts on my mind, which, while it melts and ſubdues my heart, does not raiſe a bluſh for the unconquerable weakneſs it confeſſes.

This affecting converſation, to which tears on my ſiſter's part and mine were the only interruption, and which made the eyes of our dear and amiable Lady Aubrey overflow with a bitterneſs that almoſt wholly exhauſted her, terrified me with the apprehenſion of her ſinking wholly under her agitations. I entreated her to defer for the preſent all future diſcourſe on this ſubject, and to allow of our leaving her. But to this ſhe would not be perſuaded to conſent. My ſorrows have been of ſuch a nature, ſaid ſhe,

ſhe, that all communication of them is impoſſible; and confidence, a ſolace which except my dear deceaſed friend, Madame de St. Hillaire, I never could enjoy. A painful mixture of ſhame and pride, encreaſed perhaps by early proſperity and indulgence, ſealed my lips, and confined my ſufferings to my own ſolitary and deſolated boſom; how then can my children, my dear children, (repeated ſhe, folding us alternately in her arms), deny me the ſatisfaction of giving vent to griefs in which their ſympathetic hearts muſt feel a generous concern.

You may believe, Sophia, we returned the kind careſſes of this amiable friend with all the enthuſiaſtic warmth which a conduct ſo amiable, ſo truly great, could not fail to excite in circumſtances ſo ſingularly intereſting.

Lady Aubrey then proceeded to inform us, that Mr. Benſeley had minutely acquainted her with all our intended ſchemes, and had with his uſual kindneſs voluntarily promiſed, ſhould his declining health permit of ſuch a journey, to pay her a viſit in the courſe of the following ſummer, attended by his wards; to whom this angelic woman was to have been perſonally introduced as a lady who honoured him with ſingular marks of friendſhip and regard, but without the ſlighteſt hint of any ſecret connection.

To this ſoothing ſcheme, ſaid Lady Aubrey, which I have been unceaſingly revolving in my mind how to accompliſh, I returned a moſt grateful and glad aſſent, and requeſted to know at what time you were expected in England. But alas! to this letter I received no anſwer. I wrote another, and was informed by a relation, who had opened it after Mr. Benſeley's deceaſe, that the worthy man was no more. It is not

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eaſy to expreſs the anguiſh and diſappointment I experienced on hearing this diſmal intelligence. Tho' inured to mortification and regret I found I had yet much to undergo ere I became callous to their attacks. This blow, by overturning the ſole favorite plan on which I had built any remaining hopes of comfort, ſunk me to the loweſt ſtate of deſpondency; and the loſs of my invaluable friend, Madame de St. Hillaire, put the finiſhing ſtroke to my ſufferings.

This laſt calamity preſſed hard indeed. In all my other diſtreſſes, this beloved friend had been, under heaven, my chief ſupport, and had in ſome meaſure ſupplied the place of all I had loſt. I had ſtill a friend to love, a friend who returned my warm affection. An early ſeparation from my relations in England, had kept me a ſtranger to all of them, my aunt, Lady Meredith excepted, and ſhe I had known for too ſhort a period to feel for her that attachment which now fills my heart. I was then bereft of my laſt, my only friend. Ah! can human miſery preſent a more diſmal picture to a heart of ſenſibility, than the melancholy conſideration that none exiſts to animate the feelings of fervent affection?

Still, however, the only form in which alleviation touched my boſom, was the hopes of one day meeting with you; and revolving on the means to procure myſelf this conſolation, in ſome meaſure diſſipated my gloomy reflections. I knew not where, or to whom to apply for information; and was in this ſtate of melancholy and uncertainty, when the account of my Lord Aubrey's illneſs and requeſt to ſee me arrived. Painful as was the idea of reviſiting England, I heſitated not inſtantly to comply: and my repugnance

pugnance was in a great meaſure ſubdued, by the hopes of gaining ſome information relative to you, tho' to chance alone I could owe the intelligence. Little likelihood indeed remained of ſucceſs. A cruel peculiarity of circumſtances deprived me of any light to guide my reſearches, and an open and avowed purſuit was precluded me. Yet the poſſibility ſoothed and ſupported my ſpirits; and it was not till I had been ſome weeks in London, that I found how totally impracticable it was to diſcover a private family whoſe names muſt ever be carefully guarded from my ears. My own maid, who had been with me from my early youth, I ventured to entruſt with the enquiry, and two different channels of information occurred; by means of Lady Linroſe's ſervants, with one of whom ſhe was acquainted; and if this failed, Mr. Benſeley's relation might be applied to; but that gentleman I found was lately gone to Holland; and when I addreſſed myſelf by letter to him on the ſubject, he aſſured me in anſwer that the ladies names were as wholly unknown to him as was their abode; and Lady Linroſe's maid alſo informed mine that ſhe did not believe two ſuch relations were expected by the family, nor had ſhe learnt that any account of them had been received.

Worn out by ſucceſſive diſappointments, I could only conjecture that you were ſtill in Languedoc; and unwillingly conſtrained to relinquiſh this purſuit, I prepared myſelf for taking poſſeſſion of my country reſidence according to the dying requeſt of Lord Aubrey, where I was anxious to find myſelf calmly ſettled. Fatigued with the civilities and attentions paid me by a numerous claſs of diſtant relations and family

mily acquaintance, who crowded on me immediately on my arrival, I determined to ſet out for Aubrey Caſtle even at that unpropitious ſeaſon of the year, in defiance of ſundry remonſtrances from my friends, and contrary to the wiſhes of my kind aunt, who promiſed to follow when the ſpring was further advanced. How ſhall I ever bleſs this reſolution, concluded Lady Aubrey, how fervently ſhall my grateful prayers aſcend to the Almighty, for having inſpired a meaſure from which I have derived ſuch unſpeakable comfort!

Shall not we too bleſs heaven, cried I, every hour of our lives, for the fortunate and providential rencontre? Ah! had we known, while we remained in that inhoſpitable city diſowned and unfriended—had we but ſuſpected that it contained one kind, invaluable friend, who could have participated in our difficulties, ſoothed our diſappointments, and aided us with comfort and advice, what an altered aſpect muſt it not have worn! Lady Aubrey's kind intereſt would have compenſated for every mortification, her friendſhip would have ſupported us under every reverſe, and bleſt in her ſociety, the cruelty of our relations would have loſt the ſevere pang it inflicted.

MAY 1

Lady Aubrey finds herſelf now ſo much recovered, that the phyſicians declare their attendance no longer neceſſary, and ſhe is now left to Mr. Rudder's care, who generally viſits her twice a day.

I have inſiſted on attending her conſtantly; and inſtead of ceremoniouſly refuſing my aſſiſtance, ſhe receives it with undiſguiſed pleaſure, and regards my ſolicitude and anxiety with a warmth of gratitude which would a thouſand times repay my fatigues, were they even as ſevere as ſhe perpetually imagines them to be; but the permiſſion of being conſtantly with her, is a privilege and indulgence which I would not for the world relinquiſh. She is ſtill very weak; and I am ſo peremptory in the duties of my office as nurſe, that I will not allow of her converſing on ſubjects which I know muſt agitate and affect her. This morning, however, ſhe entreated me to acquaint her where and in what manner we had lived ſince our arrival in England, and I gave her a brief account of our ſituation. This I could not poſſibly contrive to do, without touching on our diſappointment in regard to Lord Belmont: but I paſſed over it as ſlightly as was in my power. She ſighed bitterly however at my relation: alas! ſaid ſhe, how differently *men* feel: even in his place I ſhould have taken you with delight to my boſom.

In talking of pecuniary matters, I mentioned my obligations to Mr. Roatſley. Yet, Sophia, dearly as I love and reſpect Lady Aubrey, I could not confeſs more. Shame tied my tongue, and my cheeks even glowed on repeating his name. I have heard a great character of that young man abroad, ſaid ſhe. He ſpent ſome weeks at Liſle, where he was much careſſed and admired; but as I never quitted my home, and never enlarged the private circle who ſometimes favored me with their viſits, I was ſpared all chance of meeting with him.

Adieu.

H. SEYMOUR.

LETTER XVI.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

MAY 13.

LADY Meredith left us ſome days ago. Her old man at home, ſhe ſaid, would be impatient for her return, and ſhe was ſenſible to what admirable hands ſhe entruſted the care of her dear niece's health. The interval ſince I laſt wrote, has indeed produced a change ſo favorable in Lady Aubrey's health, that ſhe is able to join us in the parlour; and finds herſelf ſo well, that ſhe talks of leaving Hubert Hill in a few days. This reſolution we have all combated with all the arguments and entreaties poſſible; but ſhe tells us ſeriouſly that ſhe really longs to find herſelf tranquilly eſtabliſhed in her new reſidence; and we have at length, tho' with great unwillingneſs, given up our importunities.

You may believe I readily and joyfully conſented to her earneſt requeſt of accompanying her to Aubrey Caſtle, where Mr. and Mrs. Howard are to follow when ſome little buſineſs which at preſent detains the former here is concluded.

MAY 20.

I am ſtill at Hubert Hill. Our beloved Lady Aubrey ſet off this morning by herſelf. This change in our plans is occaſioned by an indiſpoſition

poſition which has ſeized my ſiſter, and which, without being in the leaſt alarming, renders her low ſpirited and oppreſt. I ſhould have been uneaſy at leaving her in her preſent ſituation; and Lady Aubrey, had I inclined, would not have deſired it. She has contented herſelf therefore with exacting Mr. Howard's promiſe to carry us both to her in a ſhort time, when his buſineſs is finiſhed and my ſiſter's health re-eſtabliſhed.

Short as is to be this interval of abſence, we did not ſeparate without tears. How gracious, Sophia, have been the diſpenſations of Providence towards us! when we imagined ourſelves deſerted by the whole world, Mr. Howard excepted, and felt ourſelves outcaſts from our family, with what augmented reliſh muſt we not enjoy the ſoothing idea of poſſeſſing a tender and invaluable friend, who gratifies our hearts every moment with new proofs of attachment, and to whom our tenderneſs and regard are equally eſſential. What a new ſource of happineſs has this unexpected connexion produced!

JUNE 3.

Mr. Howard, who is ever anxious to afford us ſuch amuſements as the uniformity of our tranquil ſtile of life admits, aſked me on Tueſday morning if I choſe to accompany him in an excurſion on horſeback towards a part of the country that was entirely new to me, and beautifully romantic. I gladly conſented; but juſt as we were equipt for our little excurſion, his attorney from town arrived on buſineſs, and per-

perceiving how inconvenient his leaving home muſt prove, I inſiſted on proſecuting my expedition without him; and merely taking old James the gardener, who has paſt his days in the country, as my eſcort.

Fanny was lazy, and would not be perſuaded to ſtir from her work; ſo I ſet off about eleven, the morning being delicious for the ſeaſon, eager to explore ſome particular pictureſque ſcenes which Mr. Howard had deſcribed as admirable ſubjects for my pencil.

The country around was ſo ſingularly beautiful, that I was tempted to go on further than I at firſt intended; for as we are regular people at Hubert Hill, and keep early hours, I wiſhed to be home by two o'clock; but the ſight of a very fine country ſeat at no great diſtance induced me to prolong my ride, from the deſire of admiring it on a nearer view.

I had juſt turned the wall of a park that ſurrounded a houſe of a very noble appearance, which James, to whom I applied for information, acquainted me was called Holtenham Abbey, when a party of gentlemen and ladies iſſuing from a gate, with the intention of croſſing the road, made my mare plunge, and unable to recover my ſeat, I was thrown from it with ſuch violence that ſcreams reſounded from every voice.

Happily I did not ſuffer from any intanglement with the ſtirrup or accoutrements, and felt at the moment no other bad conſequences from the fall, than the painful one of confuſion at having ſo many people to witneſs this awkward accident, added to that diſmay which the ſudden ſhock unavoidably occaſioned me.

I believe half a dozen gentlemen at leaſt flew inſtantly to my aſſiſtance, to raiſe me from the ground, where, confounded and without motion, I lay for ſome moments. Good heavens, Madam, exclaimed they all, one after another, how do you find yourſelf? I hope you are not hurt? Where have you ſuffered? and the reſt of the company, who ſeemed diſperſed in walking parties of two or three together, juſt then coming up, I felt myſelf nearly as ſeverely ſtunned by the ſucceſſive repetitions of the ſame enquiries, to which at firſt I was unable to make any reply, as I was by the fall itſelf. Smelling bottles were preſented me from all quarters; yet ſome little time elapſed before I could even recollect myſelf ſufficiently to expreſs my thanks for the kindneſs and humanity of their ſolicitude.

An elderly lady, who appeared particularly concerned for me, and who ſeemed to be owner of the noble manſion, inſiſted, the moment I was a little recovered, on having me conveyed into the houſe, from which an avenue of no great length only divided us; and aſked me, with much civility and tenderneſs, if I found it impoſſible with aſſiſtance to walk towards it.

Happy to eſcape from the company, and embarraſſed by the curioſity and notice I excited, I thankfully accepted this obliging offer, and made a feeble attempt to move forward.

Pray allow me the honor of conducting you, ſaid a young man, who had obliged me to lean on his arm, but whoſe face from perturbation I had not yet diſtinguiſhed: the voice, however, was familiar to my ears, and on regarding him I recollected my aſſiſtant to be Captain Bradſhaw, the friend of Roatſley, againſt whom, notwithſtanding that circumſtance, I had conceived

ceived no ſmall degree of prejudice, from cauſes which you will I am certain recollect.

At the inſtant I caſt my eyes on him, Miſs Seymour, I believe, ſaid he, and bowed with a diffidence that teſtified he had not forgotten the ſelf-introduction to which he owed the acquaintance.

The old lady then led the way; and I ſlowly followed, ſupported by Mr. Bradſhaw, without whoſe aſſiſtance I now found I ſhould have been unable to have ſtirred, from a ſevere ſprain in my foot. Indeed ſo painful did it feel, that had not my anxiety to eſcape from obſervation ſupplied me with fortitude to endure the uneaſineſs that walking occaſioned, I ſhould have concluded moving impoſſible.

Moſt of the ladies ſeemed inclined to accompany us, tho' I very earneſtly entreated that I might not be the means of interrupting their walk. My worthy patroneſs however perceiving their intended civility conſiderably encreaſed my perplexity, immediately ſaid, pray, ladies and gentlemen, don't let this accident interfere with your rambles: ſince it has not, thank heaven, turned out very unhappily, Mr. Bradſhaw and I ſhall attend the young lady; and ſaying this, ſhe made a motion with her hand, which obliged the whole party, tho' with ſeeming reluctance, to leave us; for ſo powerfully does curioſity and the love of novelty prevail in moſt diſpoſitions, that perceiving I was not a ſevere ſufferer from the accident, the company appeared to regard it as a little adventure, the concluſion of which they ſhould not have been ſorry to have witneſſed.

When we reached the houſe, at which I did not arrive without conſiderable difficulty, the door was opened by a footman, who uſhered us

into a ſuperb parlour, where a young lady apparently of about ſeventeen, who might have ſat for the picture of Hebe, was placed by the fire with a book in her hand.

She ſeemed to have been confined by ſome ſlight ailment, having a large cap and hood tied careleſsly under her chin.

I have brought you an unfortunate invalid, Miſs Lucy, cried my conductreſs, and explained my accident in a few words, while Mr. Bradſhaw flew to procure me a glaſs of cold water.

Good God, Madam, what a ſhocking accident! cried the young lady with much kindneſs. How dreadfully pale you look: pray where are you hurt? I hope not ſeverely? and no ſooner had I acknowledged that I ſuſpected my foot had been ſlightly diſlocated, than ſhe inſiſted on ſupporting me into her dreſſing room; where, while the lady of the houſe diſpatched a ſervant for a neighbouring ſurgeon, this amiable ſtranger aſſiſted her maid in chafing my foot with Goulard and water to allay the ſwelling, which had encreaſed rapidly from the effort of walking.

Lady Mary, for ſo I found this hoſpitable old lady was called, ordered wine and cordials of all kinds to be inſtantly brought, which ſhe inſiſted on adminiſtering to me with a benevolence that diſplayed her character in a point of view ſo humane as to give me the moſt favourable opinion of her heart. Her young friend was if poſſible ſtill more kind and equally anxious to provide every thing for my eaſe and comfort. My foot however grew more uneaſy, and ſoon became ſo ſwelled as to be perfectly ſtiff and extremely painful.

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Finding myſelf worſe, I was apprehenſive of being laid up with this ſtranger family, which ſpite of their civility and goodneſs might have proved as inconvenient for them as diſagreeable to myſelf: I made therefore as light of the accident as I poſſibly could; aſſured the ladies it was quite trifling, and inſiſted on remounting my mare and returning home; promiſing to walk her gently, and pleading the terror my ſiſter muſt endure at my unaccountable length of abſence.

The ſurgeon made his appearance juſt as I ſpoke, and joined the ladies in regarding this propoſal as abſolute frenzy. There is no treating caſualties of ſuch a nature in this manner, Madam, ſaid he, with much pompoſity, and though it is to be hoped that ten days confinement, with proper care, may effect a cure, as many weeks, if you are imprudent, may not ſet you again on foot.

If I was your father or mother, my dear Madam, cried Lady Mary, or any relation who poſſeſſed authority or influence over you, I ſhould not only now, but *for ever* prohibit your again venturing on the back of that fiery, dangerous animal. I can no way reconcile myſelf, added ſhe, to the preſent prevailing mode of ladies becoming profeſſed jockies; an unaccountable paſſion for the maſculine accompliſhment of horſemanſhip ſeems now a days to have extended even to our ſex, and it muſt certainly be acknowledged the leaſt graceful and moſt abſurd cuſtom that faſhion ever introduced among females. I am ſure it perſuades many a timid girl to brave dangers from which, under any other form, ſhe would ſhrink with terror: but the *ton* is not only a ſufficient apology for ſuch

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enterprizes, but a ſupport likewiſe. Excuſe the freedom of my obſervation, dear Madam, continued ſhe with a good humoured ſmile, and pray give me leave to ſend to inform your friends that you are ſafe and in good hands.

I returned a thouſand thanks to Lady Mary for her benevolent civilities; but entreated ſhe would not inſiſt on my ſtay, as I acknowledged myſelf extremely anxious to get home, and aſſured her there was not the ſlighteſt probable danger in my returning on horſeback, as my mare was remarkably ſafe, and my fall had merely reſulted from the ſudden appearance of ſome of the company, which had ſtartled her.

As to your going on horſeback, cried ſhe, pray talk of it no more, for indeed you muſt not think of ſuch imprudence. However, ſince you are ſo very eager to leave us, I really wiſh it was in my power to contrive your removal in the way that ſhould the leaſt ſubject you to inconvenience and uneaſineſs; but unfortunately I have at preſent no carriage to offer you; my niece's chariot requiring ſome alterations, was left behind us in town, ſo that for ſome weeks we ſhall have no equipage but my coach, which a lady, who is juſt now my gueſt, got this morning to pay a viſit in the neighbourhood, and I am really uncertain whether or not ſhe will be home till the evening. Pray, my dear, turning to her young friend, are there any hopes, think you, that Lady Linroſe will behave better than her promiſe, and return to us before dinner?

Conceive my regret and aſtoniſhment, Sophia, at the ſound of a name I ſo little expected to hear, and imagine to yourſelf my concern upon finding there was ſo much probability of

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my meeting with her Ladyſhip, which her return every inſtant might ſubject me to; a mortification which of all things on earth I moſt wiſhed to avoid. I was thunderſtruck on perceiving myſelf plunged into a ſituation ſo awkward, and changed colour ſo rapidly, that had not the ladies been happily otherwiſe engaged, they muſt have remarked my emotion.

I am indeed afraid, Madam, replied Miſs Lucy, that my mother's return will hardly leave time ſufficient for the young lady's removal this evening; for you know Mrs. Pelcourt and ſhe are old friends; they muſt always have a long chat when they meet, and I make no doubt that if ſhe inſiſts on it, my mother will paſs the day with her.

Her mother. Here was a freſh ſurpriſe, which wholly diſconcerted me. To find myſelf all at once involved in difficulties ſo ſingular and unlooked for, ſurrounded by relations who had behaved ſo unworthily by me, and who muſt feel themſelves, when they made the diſcovery, ſo aſhamed, ſo vexed at the rencontre, threw me into a confuſion and perplexity not to be expreſſed; and the idea that it was not impoſſible but Roatſley himſelf might be of the party, put the finiſhing ſtroke to my embarraſſment.

You will aſk, I know, Sophia, why I, who was on this occaſion the ſuffering perſon, who had done no injury to Lady Linroſe, and who had no cauſe to bluſh for my conduct towards her or her family, ſhould undergo ſuch apprehenſions at the thoughts of ſeeing her:—apprehenſions that ought only to have attended the conſciouſneſs of miſconduct. I own there might have been more ſpirit perhaps in braving than

than in yielding to my preſent feelings; but the certainty of plunging a whole family into confuſion was by no means either ſoothing to my pride or gratifying to my reſentment. I felt myſelf an unwelcome intruder, who was about to create diſturbance and uneaſineſs, and I ſunk under the dread of the ſcene that awaited me.

Come, dear Madam, cried Lady Mary, finding I was ſilent, this day at leaſt you muſt be contented to remain my gueſt: to-morrow, if you continue thus impatient, my carriage ſhall attend your commands; but in the mean time pray allow me to aſk whither the meſſage ſhall be directed with the aſſurances of your ſafety?

You are all goodneſs, Madam, ſaid I at length, and I am truly aſhamed of appearing thus obſtinate and ungrateful; but indeed buſineſs of real moment, buſineſs of the laſt importance, renders my abſence from home ſo particularly unfortunate, that my ſtay is impoſſible.

I ſpoke with an energy that I believe ſurpriſed them, and muſt have ſurmounted all oppoſition had my removal been practicable.

Since the lady is ſo eager to be gone, ſaid the ſurgeon, I think ſhe might be conveyed with tolerable ſafety in a coach, where her leg might be extended at eaſe on the oppoſite ſeat; but as for any other mode of travelling, particularly on horſeback, that, Madam, addreſſing himſelf to me with much importance, you would find not merely inconvenient but painful in the extreme, and really when patients refuſe to be directed by their medical attendants, they undoubtedly cannot become reſponſible for the conſequences of imprudence.

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The awkwardneſs of my ſituation giving defiance to all alarm, I was beyond meaſure provoked with the pedantic parade of this man, who made my determination to depart appear ſtill more ſtubborn and unaccountable: but the moment he left the room, I enquired, tho' with many expreſſions of gratitude and obligation, if a carriage could not be procured from the neighbouring village.

It is a poor little place, anſwered Lady Mary, and boaſts of no conveyance beyond a cart. I believe a hired chaiſe might indeed be had from N——; but 'tis twelve miles diſtant, and it muſt be ſo late before it could arrive, that I ſhould imagine a few hours could make little difference. 'Tis already almoſt two; and before a ſervant could go and return, the night muſt be far advanced: at all events to-morrow you ſhall have my coach; and tho' I ought to aſk pardon for importuning you ſo much, I muſt confeſs that I ſecretly ſuſpect this buſineſs of importance to be nothing more than a pretext under which you wiſh to relieve the fears of your family in perſon. Now, my dear Madam, be aſſured I ſhall be moſt happy to be favoured with the company of any of your friends who on this occaſion may chuſe to viſit you, and as a meſſage to that effect can be inſtantly diſpatched by your own ſervant, ſome of your family will join you in a few hours.

This is a plan, cried Miſs Lucy with the utmoſt kindneſs, which cannot fail to render you perfectly at eaſe; ſo do pray, dear Madam, be prevailed with at leaſt to continue with us till morrow.

My ſituation became now more diſtreſſing than ever. I at laſt determined on diſpatching

James in all haſte to Hubert Hill, with orders to return with Mr. Howard's one horſe chair, and this plan I flattered myſelf would ſave me the mortification of the impending meeting, as in all likelihood it would arrive before Lady Linroſe returned from her viſit.

Yet a thouſand different reaſons rendered this ſcheme, tho' the beſt I could deviſe at the time, defective and uncomfortable. Lady Linroſe I might by this means avoid; but her ſon might ſtill be of the party; he, and the reſt of the family, I might ſtill encounter; and the late pecuniary tranſactions that had taken place ſince we laſt met, the indigent light in which I had been repreſented to him, and the pride and incivility of his behaviour on the diſcovery he had ſo recently made, all conſpired to make me wiſh myſelf in any quarter of the globe at that inſtant rather than under the ſame roof with him. A confuſion of painful and even oppoſite ſenſations agitated and perplexed me, while I felt proud, piqued, and diſpleaſed. I was ſunk, humbled, and dejected, and tears, owing their ſource leſs to mortification than ſenſibility, threatened every moment to burſt from my eyes.

This plan, however, I now diſcovered with bitter diſmay, was impracticable, for the day had ſuddenly changed its aſpect, and it rained with great violence; and tho' I would with pleaſure have defied any inconveniency, I knew not how to inſiſt further on departing without incurring the imputation of being ſelf-willed and capricious. The weather equally prohibited every mode of travelling, excepting that which was not to be procured; therefore all reſiſtance was at an end; and it only remained that I ſhould endeavour to comply with a good

grace to this cruel neceſſity. My countenance, I am afraid, betrayed my feelings; for my two amiable companions joined in intreating me to make myſelf eaſy, and beſought me to loſe no time in diſpatching my ſervant home with Lady Mary's kind meſſage to my friends.

Juſt as they ſpoke, two ladies entered the dreſſing room. May I uſe the freedom to enquire for the young lady, ſaid one of them, (whom I recollected to have been particularly obliging and attentive to me at the moment of my accident,) I was ſorry to learn below that it had been found neceſſary to call a ſurgeon.

His attendance Madam, anſwered I, was wholly unneceſſary, as a ſlight ſprain is all the inconvenience my fall has occaſioned; and I am ſure I ought not to regret an accident to which I owe ſo much kindneſs and civility.

Indeed I am extremely ſorry you have been ſo unfortunate, returned ſhe; tho' we have profited ſo much from the event, that if it is only the means of confining you with us for ſome little time, we ſhall find difficulty enough in regretting it.

I endeavoured to return an anſwer expreſſive of my ſatisfaction on having encountered a family whoſe humanity did ſo much honor to their characters; but my mind was uneaſy, and I fear my looks contradicted my words.

Yes, cried Lady Mary, interrupting me, yet you were ſo extremely unwilling to truſt yourſelf, tho' but for a ſingle night, with this ſame hoſpitable family, that do you know, niece, our invalid inſiſted on returning upon the identical horſe that gave us all this alarm, in ſpite of the ſurgeon's denunciation againſt ſo imprudent a ſcheme?

Good

Good heavens! dear Madam, what an idea! But I hope you have entirely given up all thoughts of ſuch a plan.

Before I proceed, however, in my account of this formidable day, I muſt interrupt the preſent converſation by giving you a deſcription of this lady, whoſe manners and converſation appear ſo affable and engaging. I told you there were two who entered together; but the friend who accompanied this engaging young lady, and on whoſe arm ſhe hung, was remarkable for nothing but an air of ſycophantiſh obſequiouſneſs, which inſtantly informed me ſhe reſided in the family in the comfortable capacity of an humble friend.

The young lady herſelf appeared about twenty. Her extreme height, which rendered her figure at firſt ſight remarkable, had not imbibed the ſlighteſt degree of that awkwardneſs which often in very tall people precludes grace; on the contrary, her form was uncommonly elegant, and her features, tho' not ſo regular on examination as a firſt glance led me to conclude, being embelliſhed by a very beautiful complexion, and her ſhape improved by an eaſy air, fully entitled her to the encomium of being what is generally eſteemed *a prodigious fine woman*. You will preſently diſcover, Sophia, why my pen is ſo minute in its deſcriptions.

I was much embarraſſed how to make an adequate return to ſo much civility, and yet retain in my own option the power of departing ſhould an opportunity offer.

I hope you will believe, Ladies, ſaid I at length, that on any other occaſion I ſhould have been beyond meaſure gratified with an opportunity of cultivating an acquaintance, which

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even by anticipation gives me the moſt ſincere pleaſure; but this day my leaving home is ſo ſingularly inconvenient, that I muſt confeſs I ſhall not be quite at eaſe till I find myſelf there; and if the evening improves, I hope you will neither conclude me ungrateful nor obſtinate, if I ſtill perſiſt in my firſt intentions. Hubert Hill is not, by my ſervant's account, above ſeven or eight miles diſtant, and I mean to ſend him off directly with orders to return with Mr. Howard's little carriage, which if the afternoon proves tolerable, is a very eaſy conveyance.

Oh no doubt he will ſend his coach for you, cried the young lady. But are you quite determined to leave us?

Mr. Howard! ſaid Lady Mary. I have the pleaſure of knowing him well, and an excellent man he is. I was indeed told that he had lately entered into the married ſtate, but I did not know how fortunate he had been.

Perceiving her miſtake, I preſently undeceived her by ſaying that my ſiſter was equally ſo in her union with a man of his ſingular worth.

I make no doubt of it, returned ſhe: Mr. Howard is a character of uncommon merit, whoſe connexion muſt confer happineſs on any family with whom he is allied. I had at all events intended myſelf the honor of waiting upon him and his new married lady, but I ſhall now have an additional motive.

Both Mr. Howard and my ſiſter, I told her, would be much flattered with the intended favor; and added, that my brother's one horſe chair would prove a ſafe and comfortable conveyance for my return, as in ſpite of my apparent courage I felt no inclination to venture on horſe-

horſeback, ſince a more agreeable method of getting home could be adopted.

It was wonderful to obſerve the ſudden change which this laſt ſpeech effected upon the manners of the young lady whoſe affability had hitherto appeared ſo engaging. An expreſſion of ſurprize, which her countenance betrayed, might have paſſed unnoticed, as alſo the obſervation of her companion, who had not as yet articulated one ſyllable, but had remained in reſpectful ſilence till a faint ſmile from her young patroneſs induced her to ſay, truly it may prove a very ſafe, but ſure it can't prove a very comfortable conveyance in ſuch an evening as this promiſes to be.

The alteration which took place in the behaviour of the other, ſoon after convinced me I had conſiderably abated of my importance in her eyes, from being known. She immediately walked towards the window; her friend followed, and they whiſpered together ſome minutes, while the bell ſummoned Miſs Lucy's maid to diſpatch James to Hubert Hill.

So 'tis only the people at the little white houſe on the hill, ſaid the young lady in a low voice which I could diſtinctly overhear while the meſſage was tranſacting; her friend replied with ſo much caution that I could only diſtinguiſh the words, quite private ſort of people, I aſſure your Ladyſhip.

Lady Mary looked towards them as if uneaſy at their behaviour, and addreſſing herſelf to her niece, endeavoured to engage her in general converſation: but evidently undeceived as to the fancied importance of the viſitor, her looks of civility and expreſſions of kindneſs were converted into ſilent indifference and haughty uncon-

concern; and as if her curioſity had been now thoroughly ſatisfied, ſhe ſoon after left the room.

Well, Miſs Seymour, cried Lady Mary, whether you leave us or not, pray, while we have the pleaſure of your company, don't let me deprive the reſt of my gueſts of partaking of it. I hope you are able to walk into the next room.

The amiable Miſs Dudley then inſiſting that I ſhould take the aſſiſtance of her arm, I made ſhift, tho' with no ſmall degree of pain, to walk into the drawing-room, which was luckily on the ſame floor.

When we entered, we found ſeveral gentlemen and ladies differently employed: the young lady before mentioned was placed at the harpſichord, ſurrounded by moſt of the former, whom ſhe ſeemed enchanting by the divine power of muſic. Our appearance interrupted her for a moment; but after ſlightly bowing, ſhe continued her concerto.

The gentlemen all advanced, and made their enquiries after me with great politeneſs. I caſt my eyes over them with an anxious look, and a ſenſation of ſomething not unlike diſappointment, on perceiving that Roatſley was not of the party, diſcovered to me that I ſhould not have been quite ſo ſorry to have beheld him as I had imagined.

Captain Bradſhaw, the only perſon in company whom till that morning I had ever ſet eyes on, appeared to regard himſelf as an acquaintance, and paid me particular attention. Ah, Sophia! how do trifles, as I have more than once obſerved, often influence us! This young man, againſt whom I had cheriſhed no ſmall degree of diſlike, now no longer appeared what I uſed formerly to conſider him. Nothing had occurred

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to alter my prejudice; yet it was already gone. I could regard him only as the friend of Roatsley; as his friend, I was convinced he must have merit; and the attentions of that friend could not but prove agreable to me.

The certainty too of making him abjure his injurious opinion of me, gratified my pride, and the idea, supposing Roatsley was not at Holtenham, that on their next meeting Capt. Bradshaw might chance to mention me to him, gave life to my conversation, even while my spirits were every moment sinking under the apprehension of the return of Lady Linrose.

I could not help feeling confounded, when Miss Lucy Dudley, taking her reference from Mr. Bradshaw, called me occasionally *Miss Seymour*. The name, it is true, could lead to nothing, yet the certainty that she must have heard of me under that appellation confused me.

Oh! with what pleasure did I contemplate the countenance of the only female relation, my sister excepted, whom I ever recollect to have seen, and how did I trace all the amiable qualities in its expression which Miss Parsons's letter led me to expect! Miss Jenny kindly tells me, that a family likeness between her features and mine augmented the partiality she was inclined to feel for her. Ah! Sophia! do you imagine that a strong and remarkable resemblance to her brother diminished the affection I was disposed to retain for her, from the moment she was introduced to me?

The instant I was presented to her, I thought I remembered having seen her before; but it was not immediately that I recollected her to be the young lady who once occasioned me a pang, (I am sorry to confess it), not unlike jealousy on

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perceiving her ſeated next her brother at the Opera, the evident object of his peculiar regard. There is the ſtrongeſt ſimilarity in the tones of their voices, which are both uncommonly pleaſing, and ſomething even in their turn of expreſſion ſo much alike, that the ſweet Lucy recalled her brother every inſtant to my mind. Indeed, independent of this prepoſſeſſion, her countenance and manners convey an idea of ſuch infinite ſweetneſs and ſenſibility, that I think at all times I muſt have been partial to her.

She had placed herſelf on the ſopha by me; but in ſpite of her evident wiſh to leſſen the awkwardneſs of my ſituation, ſurrounded by a large company to whom but two hours before I had been accidentally introduced, and not one of whoſe names, (Capt. Bradſhaw's excepted), I even knew, you may believe the converſation was not kept up without viſible difficulty.

At this time the young lady, before ſo particularly deſcribed, ſat at her harpſichord rattling over ſome little cotillion tunes, and occaſionally interrupting herſelf to laugh and chat with ſeveral gentlemen who leant over her chair. Indeed I ſoon perceived the muſic was only a pretence to render the converſation, of which the poor ſtranger was evidently the topic, leſs remarked. She often looked at me herſelf, and carried the eyes of the gentlemen to examine me, while ſhe continued her diſcourſe in a half whiſper, which the jumbling of the keys prevented my overhearing.

She appeared in great ſpirits; but an affectation too viſible in every motion deſtroyed at leaſt to me the natural grace of her appearance. I began to ſuſpect ſhe might be Miſs Dudley; which idea prevented me from gratifying my

curi-

curioſity by means of her ſiſter, and I employed myſelf ineffectually in trying to diſcover a reſemblance in her features either to thoſe of Miſs Lucy or her brother.

At length, however, on that young lady's being called to the end of the room to examine ſome muſic, I enquired of Capt. Bradſhaw the name of the lady at the harpſichord; adding, I was ſo ſingularly ſituated as to be a ſtranger to the whole company.

Is it poſſible you ſhould be ignorant of it? ſaid he in a tone of ſurpriſe. It is the celebrated and admired Lady Elizabeth Sedley, whom I am certain you muſt at leaſt have heard of often.

Sophia, conceive, if you can, my feelings at this information. Ah! no! it is impoſſible: for except in a ſimilar ſituation, they are not to be conceived. My heart beat violently, even while a ſudden faintneſs came over me, and I fear my agitation muſt have been too apparent, for Miſs Lucy juſt then returning to her ſeat, ſaid with much ſweetneſs—I am afraid, Miſs Seymour, your foot is more uneaſy than you will own, for you look extremely pale; and Mr. Bradſhaw fixed his eyes on me with a look of inveſtigation that ſoon changed my complexion from the pallid to a deeper dye.

The gentlemen now approaching the ſopha, the harpſichord ſeemed deſerted; and ſo I imagine, thought Lady Elizabeth, for advancing towards us, ſhe called out in a tone of careleſs familiarity, I am afraid, Miſs Seymour, this will be a miſerable afternoon for your excurſion in the one horſe chair, for it rains extremely hard.

The voice in which ſhe pronounced theſe words let me into a ſecret that I had before half ſuſpected, viz. that the meanneſs of my equi-

page

page had ſo much lowered me in her Ladyſhip's eſtimation, as to produce the change in her manner, for which I had not been able to aſſign any other motive.

I know not whether Miſs Dudley felt the indelicacy of her behaviour, but ſhe immediately ſaid, it is indeed extremely unfortunate, ſince Miſs Seymour is ſo anxious to go, that Mamma ſhould have occupied Lady Mary's coach to-day; for theſe little carriages, tho' mighty pleaſant in fine weather, are not well adapted for rain.

Oh in ſuch an evening the thing is impoſſible, cried all the gentlemen at once. Miſs Seymour cannot ſurely think of it.

It rained indeed harder than ever; and I was truly provoked by a change of weather ſo teizing and unlucky. My foot was painful, my mind uneaſy, I required reſt for both, and here I was not likely to enjoy eaſe in any form.

A carriage was ſoon after heard driving up to the door, and my heart panted with expectation. I was convinced it was Mr. Roatſley, and no longer harboured a doubt when I heard Mr. Bradſhaw call out, I dare ſay it is Roatſley, and inſtantly went out to meet him.

My perturbation, however, was not of long continuance; for this ſpeech convinced me that tho' he might be expected, he made not one of the family; and preſently after Mr. Bradſhaw returned, accompanied by Sir Edward Sudbury.

He met with a very gracious reception from the whole company, particularly from Lady Elizabeth, who ſeemed much pleaſed by his entrance. As he did not immediately recognize me amongſt ſo large a company, I began to imagine

imagine that perhaps he deſigned to conduct himſelf with a prudent reſerve; and recollecting his advances in town, which had been interrupted by my departure, now abſence had probably cooled his flame, he might incline to keep at a diſtance, and withdraw his notice by degrees.

I ſoon found, however, how unjuſt was this ſurmiſe, when Sir Edward, diſcovering me, approached with his uſual modeſty and politeneſs, a glow of ſatisfaction being viſible on his countenance.

He enquired with anxiety after my health, then for my ſiſter and Mr. Howard, and regretted in ſtrong terms my unexpected departure from town, which he ſaid had aſtoniſhed him, as he had no doubt of finding me at Mrs. Hindon's on his return from a ſhort viſit he had made in the country about that time.

Dinner was ſoon after announced; and tho' with pain I walked into the parlour, ſupported by the arm of the ſweet Lucy, who gaily ordered all the gentlemen to depart before us, and reſolutely refuſed all their offers of aſſiſting me.

She kindly placed herſelf next me at table; and Sir Edward, though Lady Elizabeth in a manner invited him to go to the other ſide by herſelf, contrived to ſeat himſelf on my other hand. This little mortification by no means ſoftened the hauteur of her behaviour to me; on the contrary, from the moment ſhe remarked Sir Edward's aſſiduities, her countenance betrayed a ſcornful diſpleaſure, but ill concealed under the maſk of neglect and indifference.

As the evening advanced, I grew more engroſſed with the expectation of ſeeing Lady Linroſe; and about eight her Ladyſhip entered the drawing-

drawing-room, accompanied by her eldeſt daughter.

I eaſily recollected the face that had been pointed out to me at the Opera. Its expreſſion, however, was much changed. The ſour ſeverity of her aſpect had now entirely given place to ſmiles, good humour, and condeſcenſion; and though I could not wholly diveſt myſelf of the prejudice of my firſt prepoſſeſſion, I had at leaſt the impartiality to condemn myſelf for it.

I hope you did not wait dinner for me, Lady Mary, cried ſhe, after the firſt compliments were over, for my good friend was rather indiſpoſed, and ſo anxious for my ſtay, that I found it would have been unkind to have refuſed.

I did not expect your Ladyſhip, returned Lady Mary, and now that you are returned I ought not to regret your abſence, as to that alone I owe the company of another viſitor, who has only favoured me with it becauſe my coach was not to be had to carry her home. Pray, give me leave, Miſs Seymour, added ſhe, to have the pleaſure of introducing you to Lady Linroſe.

I coloured at the introduction. But Lady Linroſe, with much politeneſs and no change of countenance, ſaid ſhe ſhould be happy to have the honour of knowing me, and hoped her having the carriage had been no very material inconvenience to me.

Miſs Dudley, however, to whom I underwent the ſame ceremony, only half bowing to my curtſey, ſtared me in the face with evident curioſity, and a look of ſupercilious eaſe which wholly diſconcerted me.

She

She is by no means plain; but a look of conſcious ſuperiority renders her features determinedly unpleaſing.

My accident, for which Lady Linroſe teſtified much regret and concern, furniſhed converſation for the firſt quarter of an hour: but her open and unreſerved affability immediately convinced me that no ſuſpicion had ariſen in her mind on hearing my name, and her manner was ſo totally oppoſite from what I expected to have found it, that in ſpite of my long cheriſhed reſentment I could not avoid feeling delighted to perceive the mother of Roatſley ſo much more amiable than I had conceived poſſible.

Relieved from my alarm of being known, I flattered myſelf I ſhould ſoon grow more compoſed: but ah! Sophia remained there not yet ſufficient to diſturb and diſtreſs me? Lady Elizabeth! to meet with her, and in a party ſo gay, where the relations on both ſides ſeemed met to rejoice over the approaching union which was ſoon to cement their friendſhip and intimacy by ſtill ſtronger ties! Oh how ſunk, dejected, and diſpirited did I feel!

The company were not yet ſat down to cards, but continued chatting during a ſhort interval which ſucceeded to the entrance of Lady Linroſe and her daughter, when the door opened, and Mr. Howard, who, anxious to relieve Fanny's apprehenſions, had ſet off in defiance of the inclemency of the evening, was announced.

Lady Mary received him with the kindneſs and familiarity due to an old friend, (for I find they have been long acquainted), and congratulated him on my ſafety, which I give you my word, ſaid ſhe, you chiefly owe to me; for ſo eager was Miſs Seymour to return home, that

I was

I was obliged to exert the authority which above forty years ſeniority has given me over her, to prevent her riſking her neck upon that horrid horſe of your's, which I hope you will diſpoſe of in all haſte.

My joy at ſeeing Mr. Howard, who was equally delighted to find me ſo ſlightly hurt, drove Lady Linroſe for an inſtant from my mind. The idea ſoon recurred, however, when on turning round, I perceived the alteration which his unexpected appearance had produced on her countenance. A look of gloom, aſtoniſhment, and vexation, were there predominant; and a fluſh of embarraſſment tinged her cheeks. The truth ſeemed at once to have flaſhed upon her mind. Mr. Howard, ſhe well knew; and my name had been repeated to her ſo often from his lips, that no doubt could remain. She ſeemed for a moment confounded and irreſolute, but on Lady Mary's preſenting Mr. Howard to her, ſhe appeared ſuddenly to recollect herſelf, and received him as an utter ſtranger, whom ſhe had never before beheld, with a cold formality not untinctured with hauteur.

He on his part, finding her deſign was to affect ignorance, bowed with polite diſtance, and continued to chat with his uſual eaſe to Lady Mary.

From the moment of his appearance, Lady Linroſe kept a profound ſilence. She often glanced upon me an eye of ſcrutiny as if by ſtealth, and her looks were by no means expreſſive of ſatisfaction: but the inſtant I ſeemed to remark her notice, ſhe withdrew it and employed herſelf very buſily at her knitting, which ſhe entangled and diſentangled unceaſingly with much ingenuity.

Mr.

Mr. Howard, in ſpite of the moſt preſſing entreaties, inſiſted on returning home, though the evening was damp and cold. I would have given the world to have accompanied him; but finding the propoſal would be received with great oppoſition, I prevailed on myſelf to ſay nothing, Lady Mary promiſing herſelf to accompany me to Aubert Hill in the morning.

After he was gone, the company divided into little parties. Thoſe who preferred cards, ſat down to the card-table, while moſt of the young people ſeemed more inclined to chat.

All the gentlemen, Sir Edward and Captain Bradſhaw excepted, flocked around Lady Elizabeth's chair. They ſeemed indeed moſt zealous in their devoirs, and attached themſelves wholly to her; liſtening with delight to every little ſally which levity drew from her lips, while ſhe received their homage with a pride ſhe took but little pains to conceal. Oh! my Sophia, from this ſevere expreſſion, are you not afraid that my unfortunate partiality has given birth to the worſt of paſſions, envy and injuſtice? Diſappointment, by calling forth our powers of exertion, is generally thought to improve the heart; but I fear you will conclude my mortifications have had a very different effect on mine. Believe me, however, my dear, when I ſolemnly declare that thoſe mean paſſions are far from having influenced me in my repreſentation of Lady Elizabeth. Had her manners poſſeſſed that poliſhed dignity, or her converſation that unaſſuming good ſenſe, which from the choice of Mr. Roatſley I could not but expect, be aſſured I ſhould have admired with unprejudiced eyes the woman of his heart: but oh! how oppoſite did I conceive that woman to be from what

what I find her! How pleaſed, how gratified did ſhe not ſeem with the flattery and attention of the gentlemen preſent; who really, as far as one day's acquaintance could enable me to judge, appeared uncommonly inſipid in their converſation, and far from engaging in their addreſs. But probably they ſuffered not a little from the compariſon my thoughts were continually drawing between them and another, ah! how infinitely their ſuperior.

Ought I not to regard this marriage as a material fault in Mr. Roatſley's character: for that his chief, if not his only aim in it is fortune, I cannot help being convinced; and is it not an unpardonable error to prize the advantages of ſplendour ſo highly, and to hold domeſtic happineſs in ſo low eſtimation? Yet I ought not to judge thus raſhly. We know not a thouſand circumſtances which may render this match not only laudable but meritorious; and of Lady Elizabeth I merely form my opinion from the obſervation of a few hours, where the little defects of addreſs muſt be ſuppoſed wholly to have influenced my judgment. Erroneous as this mode of concluſion may be, yet the manner ſo generally beſpeaks the character, that where the one is informed and intelligent, the other ſeldom or never appears trifling or diſguſting.

But to return to the company. Lady Linroſe being engaged at whiſt, ſtill preſerved towards me the cold diſtance ſhe had aſſumed ſince Mr. Howard's appearance, and addreſſed herſelf to me no more during the remainder of the evening. Her eldeſt daughter ſeemed languid and out of ſpirits, and at length took up a book, in which however ſhe only occaſionally looked, often recurring to the inveſtigation of

my figure, which appeared much the moſt amuſing employment of the two; for ſhe examined me ſometimes for minutes together with no great cordiality in her countenance, and with entire diſregard to the uneaſineſs it gave me. Lady Elizabeth was ſoon perſuaded to retire to the next apartment, where ſhe was ſolicited to play on the organ, which induced almoſt all the company to follow her. Miſs Lucy Dudley, however, ſeeing me diſengaged and ſilent, kindly reſumed her ſeat on a ſopha, where, with Sir Edward and Mr. Bradſhaw, we made a ſort of diſtinct coterie, and began to chat very agreeably together.

Lady Linroſe, who appeared to remark with diſpleaſure her daughter's attention to me, ſoon called her to look over her cards, and kept her by her ſide the reſt of the evening, and a meſſage from the muſic-room ſoon after requeſting Sir Edward to accompany on the flute Lady Elizabeth's voice in a ſong, unwillingly obliging him to leave the drawing-room, Mr. Bradſhaw and I were left in a manner tete-a-tete on the ſopha. I found him agreeable and intelligent, attended with a certain bluntneſs of manner which rather inſpired the idea of ſincerity than rudeneſs, and we ſoon entered into a moſt intereſting converſation.

Pray, ſaid he, may I aſk your opinion of Lady Elizabeth? She is univerſally followed and admired; yet I cannot help ſuſpecting that her ſplendid fortune and brilliant proſpects have contributed full as much to place her ſo high in the liſts of beauty as any intrinſic charms ſhe poſſeſſes; but I make no doubt you will not agree in my opinion, for I know on this ſubject it is impoſſible

impoſſible you ſhould talk according to conſcience.

Why ſo? ſaid I.

Becauſe it is wholly out of nature for one fine woman to give her genuine ſentiments of another.

Do you then imagine envy ſo univerſally prevalent?

By no means. I only believe that the terror of ſuch an imputation induces every handſome female to beſtow upon another encomiums infinitely beyond her private opinion.

To prove my ſincerity, ſaid I, I will acknowledge, that Lady Elizabeth, tho' undoubtedly a fine looking woman, is leſs ſo than from report I expected to find her.

Had ſhe truſted to nature, returned he, ſhe might have merited the appellation you give her; but affectation and coquetry will diſtort the fineſt features, and produce awkwardneſs where we ought to admire grace.

That the friend of Mr. Roatſley ſhould expreſs to a ſtranger, with ſo little reſerve, an opinion ſo unfavourable of the woman who was ſoon to be united to him, ſurpriſed me not a little, and I could only account for it by ſuppoſing that her coquetiſh behaviour had provoked him ſo much as to put him out of all patience, and had rendered his prudence off its guard.

I thought, ſaid I, all her little follies of that ſort were ſoon to have a ſpeedy concluſion.

Concluſion, repeated he, in a voice of undiſguiſed diſpleaſure; not ſo long as youth and good looks remain, I'll be ſworn; at leaſt if we may judge of the future by the prefer

I thought Lady Elizabeth had been on the verge of matrimony, ſaid I, with as much compoſure as I could aſſume, yet trembling to hear it confirmed from authority ſo indiſputable.

And pray can you, Miſs Seymour, who have paſſed part of the winter in town, pretend to imagine that matrimony, to a vain woman, excludes the attentions of a crowd of followers?

Your reproof of my ignorance is juſt, ſaid I, (attempting to ſmile, though inwardly depreſſed by an anſwer ſo unſatisfactory and evaſive, and which yet tacitly acknowledged the truth of Lady Elizabeth's engagement), but I was little in company, had few acquaintance, and ſpent my time chiefly at home in a very ſober domeſtic family.

Yes, we could not conceive where you had hid yourſelf, for you were to be ſeen no where. It was at one time concluded that you muſt have left town.

That was exactly the caſe, returned I.

Not exactly, for I think you did not go till the beginning of March.

I could not avoid being rather ſurpriſed, on finding Mr. Bradſhaw, with whom I had had when in town not the ſlighteſt intercourſe or acquaintance, ſo well informed of my motions; and reading my thoughts from a tranſient expreſſion in my countenance—you are aſtoniſhed, ſaid he, ſmiling, to find me ſo accurate in this point; but I believe you would be ſtill more ſo, were I to inform you how long I have had the honour of conſidering myſelf intimately acquainted with you, tho' entirely without your knowledge or participation.

I muſt confeſs my ſurpriſe, cried I, laughing, and alſo my regret, that I ſhould have been ſo for-

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fortunate without knowing it.

O, in regard to Miſs Seymour, I give you my word I am extremely intelligent.

I began faintly to ſuſpect from whence this information had been derived, and to flatter myſelf that it might have owed its origin to Roatſley's ſolicitude. This idea produced an anxiety beyond meaſure potent, to draw ſome ſoothing particulars from his friend; but as if eager to excite a curioſity he meant not to gratify—perhaps, cried he, you might be no leſs ſurpriſed were you to know that I was in conſtant purſuit of you all the beginning of the winter; nay, and what is yet more wonderful and perplexing, I do not claim either merit to myſelf or gratitude from you, for the indefatigable pains and induſtry I employed in hunting after you at every place of amuſement where it was probable you might appear.

It is very wonderful indeed, cried I, ſecretly delighted, nor could I ever have ſuſpected, ſtranger as I found myſelf in this country, that I poſſeſſed any friends ſufficiently intereſted in me to be ſolicitous how or where I paſſed my time.

O, cried he with an inveſtigating look that ſeemed to penetrate into what effect his words might produce, nature has been ſo bountifully profuſe to ſome of her happy favourites, as to endow them with the gift of creating friends by a *coup d'oeil*—friends, who exiſt but in their ſight, who live but on their ſmiles, and who watch with unwearied patience and aſſiduity, every opportunity for a meeting which indulgent fortune may throw in their way: friends, who develope at one glance, and adore almoſt in an inſtant, thoſe virtues and excellencies which in

common

common mortals require intimacy, inveſtigation, and length of time, to expand and diſcover themſelves.

Vague as were theſe expreſſions, a dawning ray of hope led me to give them an interpretation ſo conſcious, as covered me with bluſhes. I knew not what reply to make; and the earneſt look with which he evidently tried to develope my thoughts, compleated my embarraſſment.

I am quite in the dark, cried I at length, and cannot conceive at what you aim.

So I perceive, ſaid he with a ſatyrical ſmile; but I entreat that my words may not throw you into any perplexity. I ſhould be miſerable, were your reſt to-night to be diſturbed from a fruitleſs attempt to unriddle my myſterious oracles.

I believe my reſt will not be eaſily interrupted this night, replied I with a careleſs air, for my fatigues, or rather my alarm, has exhauſted me a good deal, and I feel quite drowſy and ſtupid.

Perceiving the gravity with which I ſpoke, Mr. Bradſhaw inſtantly aſſumed a more reſerved behaviour, and ſhifting the diſcourſe to other topics, I diſcovered that he had not gone into the country at the time I imagined, from the private converſation I overheard, nor for ſome weeks after. "I was ſeveral times under the apprehenſion of recruiting orders, ſaid he, but received a longer reprieve than I had dared flatter myſelf with the hopes of obtaining.

The card party having now concluded their rubbers, and Lady Elizabeth, with her ſuite of attendants, being returned into the drawing-room, a period was put to our converſation. But it left the ſtrongeſt impreſſion on my mind, and at ſupper I could not help ſecretly wiſhing that

that Mr. Bradſhaw might be placed next me. In this however I was diſappointed; for Sir Edward betrayed an anxiety ſo eager to procure a ſeat next mine, that the other with a grave bow gave way to him.

At this little manœuvre Lady Elizabeth appeared by no means pleaſed. Indeed nothing could be more pointed than the haughtineſs of her manner to me the whole evening. A coquet, it would appear, expects the excluſive privilege of enjoying the homage of every man who beholds her; for tho' the reſt of the gentlemen, Mr. Bradſhaw excepted, attended her with the moſt zealous aſſiduity, the mortification ſhe experienced on finding this devotion was not unanimous, evidently hurt and corroded her. Whether the meanneſs of my equipage, and the humility of my abode, at the *little white houſe on the hill*, increaſed her indignation, I know not, but ſhe regarded me with looks of contempt, and behaved to Sir Edward with ſo much childiſh ill humour, that I began at length to ſuſpect ſome ſecret partiality muſt have produced a conduct for which mere ſelfiſh vanity ſeemed an inadequate cauſe.

This ſullen behaviour of Lady Elizabeth, the cold diſtance of Lady Linroſe, and the imperious diſregard of her eldeſt daughter, added to my being conſcious how diſagreeable my preſence, tho' from very different motives, muſt prove to them all, made me feel beyond meaſure uncomfortable; and the painful weight which lay heavy at my heart, and wholly depreſſed my ſpirits, made Sir Edward's converſation not merely unpleaſant but irkſome to me; eſpecially as my ſuſpicion of Lady Elizabeth's attachment was ſtrengthened and confirmed every

every inſtant by her increaſing uneaſineſs.—When I conſidered however how inferior Sir Edward was in all points to his competitor, it was not poſſible for me to conceive that caprice, or folly itſelf, could be blind to the ſtriking difference between them.

The cordial intimacy that ſubſiſted between the two families, and indeed included all preſent but myſelf, not only excluded me from all ſhare of the converſation, which I was far from regretting, but made me feel awkward, as well as miſerable. Lady Mary indeed often addreſſed herſelf to me with peculiar civility; but as I was placed at a diſtance from her, her politeneſs did not compenſate for the rude neglect of her niece.

The converſation happening to turn on reſemblances, I think, ſaid Sir Edward, I never beheld a more ſtriking likeneſs than the profiles of Miſs Lucy Dudley and Miſs Seymour exhibit at this moment. I have been conſidering them on each ſide of me for ſome time, with almoſt an equal mixture of wonder and admiration.

A likeneſs! repeated Miſs Dudley. I muſt acknowledge I ſcarce ever beheld two faces in my opinion more oppoſite.

I am extremely ſorry to differ from you, Madam, returned he; but I ſtill dare appeal to the company if my remark is not juſt.

Strikingly ſo indeed, cried Lady Mary: tho' till it was mentioned I own I was not ſenſible of the reſemblance. But in ſpite of the difference of complexion it is really remarkable. Don't your Ladyſhip think ſo, added ſhe, turning to Lady Linroſe?

I muſt

I muſt confeſs, returned her Ladyſhip, with a cold, embarraſſed air, I am of Caroline's opinion: I cannot perceive the likeneſs.

Good Heavens! cried Caroline, how ſhould there be any? The eyes of the one are black, and Lucy's are quite blue.

I did not ſpeak of the eyes of the two ladies, but of their profiles, ſaid Sir Edward. There is even ſomewhat in the expreſſion of countenance ſo much alike, that had I never before been in company with either, I ſhould have concluded them nearly related.

What effect theſe words produced in the countenances of Lady Linroſe and her daughters, I had not reſolution to examine, and conſcious confuſion made me keep my eyes fixed on the table; from which however I ſoon raiſed them in aſtoniſhment on hearing Lady Linroſe ſay, you pay my daughter a very unmerited compliment by the compariſon, Sir Edward, and really now you put it into my head, I don't know but there is ſome ſort of likeneſs, eſpecially in the under part of the face: and ſoon after, when we were ſeparating for the night, her Ladyſhip wiſhed me a good night with particular civility and affability.

Confounded with the various events of the day, the moment I found myſelf alone in the chamber allotted me, I threw myſelf into a chair, and gave way to a train of reflections, which ſo wholly overpowered me, as to baniſh all deſire of ſleep. I could not but admire the ſingularity of that chance, which had conducted me ſo ſtrangely into the midſt of my relations, and to the party which of all others I wiſhed the moſt to avoid; while I knew that my preſence, by overwhelming them with confuſion

and embarraſſment, muſt prove ſtill more diſagreeable to them than to myſelf. Lady Elizabeth too—to feel all my half-ſuppreſſed emotions animated and renewed by this unexpected and unwiſhed for recontre, ah! Sophia! don't you pity me?

After paſſing a very reſtleſs night, I found my foot ſo much worſe, that walking even into the next room was almoſt impracticable. I therefore ſent a meſſage to Lady Mary by her maid, who aſſiſted me to dreſs, intimating that if her Ladyſhip would give me leave, I ſhould breakfaſt in my own apartment, where I wiſhed to remain till the carriage was ordered to carry me home. By this means I avoided ſeeing any of the company, whom I really dreaded encountering at breakfaſt, after the perturbation of the preceding day. I regretted however, that in eſcaping from the others, I muſt be deprived of ſeeing Mr. Bradſhaw, whoſe myſterious diſcourſe it muſt be owned aſtoniſhed though it did not perplex me, and formed no inconſiderable portion of my reflexions during the night.

Lady Mary entered my chamber ſoon after, and made a thouſand kind enquiries reſpecting my health. She informed me that Lady Linroſe was confined to bed with a headach, and that Mr. Bradſhaw had ſet off for his quarters two hours before breakfaſt: and after kindly diſapproving of my imprudence in venturing home, told me, ſince I was determined to go, ſhe ſhould herſelf ſee me ſafe to Hubert Hill, as ſhe wiſhed to take the earlieſt opportunity of waiting on Mrs. Howard.

Miſs Lucy Dudley was likewiſe ſo obliging as to pay me a viſit before I left Holtenham. While ſhe ſat with me in my chamber, Lady Mary

Mary again entered. I think an airing will be of ſervice to you, my dear, ſaid ſhe to her, after your late confinement. Pray will you accompany me to Mrs. Howard's? Her huſband is an old friend of mine, and I poſſeſs few or none I reſpect ſo highly.

With all my heart, my dear Madam, cried ſhe; and having ſent the maid for her hat, we immediately proceeded down ſtairs, which was to me a very difficult undertaking and one that I did not accompliſh without great pain, though I had an aſſiſtant on each hand.

When we entered the hall, we were met by Lady Elizabeth and Miſs Dudley. The former, with a reluctant bow, hoped I was well: and the other, without even vouchſafing me that civility, haſtily called out—Lucy, where are you going?

I mean to accompany Lady Mary and Miſs Seymour. The day is fine, and an airing will be agreeable.

I believe Mamma will not allow of your going, ſiſter.

Why ſo.

Nay, I ſhall go aſk her: and inſtantly returning, ſaid—Mamma does not chuſe you ſhould riſk taking cold by airing to-day, Lucy.

Lord how odd, when it is the ſweeteſt weather in the world.

O there is no chance of cold in ſuch a morning, cried Lady Mary. It will do her good I'm convinced.

It is Mamma's commands, ſaid Miſs Caroline gravely; and although the ſweet Lucy went herſelf to ſolicit, ſhe came back diſappointed. I am very ſorry, ſaid ſhe, taking my hand, that I cannot have the pleaſure of your company a

little

little longer; but I hope Lady Mary will viſit at Hubert Hill more than once while we remain at Holtenham, and I ſhall moſt aſſuredly be of the party next time.

Lady Linroſe, you perceive, adheres with conſcientious integrity to her promiſe of debarring all intercourſe between her family and ours. Angry as I am, there is ſomewhat in her manners ſo inſinuating, that I cannot ſo cordially blame her conduct as I did before I ſaw her: nay what is ſtill more ſtrange, I cannot avoid ſuggeſting excuſes for her behaviour; and even feel ſomewhat ſoothing and conſolatory in the idea that Roatſley's mother, whom I deſire ſo much to love and reſpect, ſeems more worthy of theſe ſentiments than I ever imagined ſhe could prove. Her ſon reſembles her extremely, though the expreſſion is different.

I believe, Sophia, prejudice and partiality blind the eye of judgment ſo unaccountably, that people are ſeldom to be truſted in their prepoſſeſſions where a ſtrong and lively intereſt is at ſtake. Perhaps we have judged too hardly of this family. To oppoſe Lord Belmont in a favourite point, may be to relinquiſh all hopes of his favour for ever; and if ſuch is the inflexibility of his temper Lady Linroſe is not ſo much to blame.

Fanny was much relieved by my return though I looked miſerably ill. My foot was painful, and my mind in agitation; and the inſtant Lady Mary left us, I was put to bed, where however I did not ſleep, but enjoyed a more ſoothing relief in relating to my ſiſter all the circumſtances of my diſagreeable advanture.

H. SEYMOUR.

LETTER XVII.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

JUNE 6.

AS my ſprain ſtill confines me to the ſopha, and my journal is always my favourite amuſement, I have employed the two laſt days almoſt conſtantly in writing. Indeed I am happy to fly to any occupation that has the power of dividing my thoughts: for my Sophia will eaſily conceive the late incident was but ill calculated for deſtroying that fatal impreſſion, which I flattered myſelf time and abſence, aſſiſted by my moſt vigorous exertions, would at length ſubdue. Would to heaven the marriage was once finally concluded. When doubt (abſurd as it is to doubt) is converted into certainty, my endeavours I am convinced muſt be ſucceſsful. I may ſuffer at firſt, but theſe turbulent feelings will abate At preſent a thouſand circumſtances are ever ready to occur to rouſe and animate an attachment alas! too inſinuating.

How can I account for Roatſley's conduct, hinted to me by his friend? Oh! my dear, was it indeed Roatſley who occaſioned Mr. Bradſhaw's reſearches? why then his ſilence to Mr. Howard's letter; and why, with engagements ſo ſerious on his hands, could he allow in himſelf a ſolicitude ſo fruitleſs? His conduct altogether is inexplicable, and the more I attempt to

to unravel it, the leſs my conjectures give me ſatisfaction.

Are you not aſtoniſhed, my love, at my repreſentation of Lady Elizabeth Sedley? Is it poſſible to believe Roatſley can make ſuch a ſacrifice to fortune? Oh! Sophia! a ſacrifice to principle I am convinced it muſt be. Duty and perſuaſion have prevailed with him to acquieſce in a match on which his family have ſet their hearts.

JUNE 10.

I have been viſited during my confinement by the good parſon's family, who ſpent yeſterday with us.

Mrs. Heathcote, though unacquainted but by report with Lady Mary Lawrence, told us a thouſand little country anecdotes of her, which all proved the goodneſs of her heart and the liberality of her ample purſe; for ſhe is poſſeſſed of a ſplendid income, having been left by her late huſband the ſole diſpoſal of his fortune. This fortune, Mrs. Heathcote ſaid, it was generally ſuppoſed would centre in her niece, Lady Elizabeth Sedley, who was not much beloved by the ladies in the neighbourhood, as ſhe uniformly behaved to them with a conſcious ſuperiority, and imperious reſerve, that rendered her company formal and diſguſting. Indeed, ſaid ſhe, her Ladyſhip, I am told, exacts deference and attention that few are willing to pay; for which reaſon there is uſually a party at Holtenham of people of the firſt rank and im-

importance from town, with whom alone Lady Elizabeth will aſſociate on a footing of equality.

I ventured to enquire, finding the good woman both intelligent and communicative, whether or not Lord Linroſe poſſeſſed any property in this part of the country. She believed not, ſhe told me: but ſince Mr. Howard had left England, above one half of the eſtates around had changed their original proprietors; and my Lord Belmont had lately made two different purchaſes of conſiderable amount, which had ſecured to him a decided parliamentary intereſt in the country? On one of theſe eſtates, ſaid ſhe, to which he has given the name of Mount Dudley, and which is not above ſeven miles diſtant, he has built a very elegant though not a very large houſe, and has preſented it to his favourite grand ſon Mr. Roatſley, who however has never lived in it, as it has not yet been put in order for a family: but I underſtand they are fitting it up in all haſte, and furniſhing it very magnificently for his place of reſidence ſo ſoon as his marriage is concluded: ſo you will have them for neighbours preſently.

Is that event ſoon to take place? demanded Fanny.

Indeed, Madam, nobody ſeems to know. It has been long talked of; and before Mr. Roatſley ſet out on his travels, every one ſaid it would happen directly on his return. But it has been whiſpered ſince his return, that matters are not in ſuch forwardneſs as was imagined. The young man's ardour is ſuſpected to be cooled; nay ſome people ſay it never was extremely violent; but that when he was very young, and the lady hardly fifteen, there ſubſiſted a childiſh attachment between them, which originated entirely

tirely on the ſide of Lady Elizabeth; and that Lord Belmont, who has been unfortunate in ſome of his family, particularly in the article of matrimony, and who was not eaſily reconciled to the preſent Lord Linroſe on his marriage, although by the death of a diſtant relation her Ladyſhip has brought him a very conſiderable fortune, exacted a promiſe, and promoted an engagement between his grandſon and this lady, which is intended to be concluded on his Lordſhip's return from the Continent.

Lady Elizabeth is much to be pitied, in my opinion, cried Fanny, if with all her ſplendid advantages of birth and fortune they cannot ſecure the heart of the man ſhe has choſen.

I agree with you perfectly, Madam. But I believe ladies of ſuperior rank and education don't always think in that manner; and by what I hear, Lady Elizabeth is not much calculated for domeſtic happineſs.

Conſcious of my ſecret anxiety, I forbore, while Mr. Howard and the reſt of the company were preſent, to prolong the ſubject: but finding myſelf accidentally alone with Mrs. Heathcote, for a quarter of an hour after dinner, I artfully renewed the topic of Lady Elizabeth; and ſhe then told me ſhe was intimately connected with the gentlewoman who had ſuperintended her education as governeſs, from whence ſhe had drawn the early part of her information. Mr. Roatſley, ſaid ſhe, has been I know acquainted with the young lady from infancy. She was his ſiſter's friend, and had often been his own playfellow. It is not improbable therefore that her infantine attachment had produced in him a return of affection before he went abroad that might partake more of gratitude

titude than paſſion. It muſt be owned Lady Elizabeth has but ill anſwered the fond expectations of her family; and probably he finds himſelf diſappointed, after ſeveral years abſence. But there is no truſting to report. It is very certain however that he has not once viſited at Holtenham ſince his arrival; though, owing to Lady Mary's indiſpoſition, the family only paſſed a very few weeks this winter in town. They ſay Lady Elizabeth is much offended at the coolneſs of his aſſiduities, and that there is a very formidable rival, Sir Edward Sudbury, in the way, who is much in favour with her Ladyſhip at preſent, but I dare ſay there is nothing in it.

All this accounts a little, Sophia, for Captain Bradſhaw's inſinuations.

JUNE 12.

To-day I have ventured to take a ſhort walk, and am conſiderably better. We have had compliments of enquiry from Lady Mary after my health more than once.

We have been rather uneaſy at not hearing from our dear, dear Lady Aubrey all this while; and we now find we have had but too much reaſon for apprehenſion: alas! ſhe has had a relapſe; but thank God not an alarming one. She is now, ſhe tells us, in the kindeſt of letters which we received this morning, quite recovered, and has got Sir William and Lady Meredith with her at the caſtle. I find myſelf ſettled here, ſays ſhe, much to my ſatisfaction. The ancient architecture of my abode has neither baniſhed light, nor precluded cheerfulneſs; and

and I am determined its grandeur ſhall on no account be fettered with ſtate or parade. My mind begins to partake of the tranquility around me; and I am enabled myſelf to taſte that comfort which an overgrown and otherwiſe uſeleſs fortune allows me the privilege of diſpenſing to others. But when ſhall my riſing ſatisfaction receive its full completion in the dear ſociety of my beloved children? when ſhall I again fold them to my heart, and receive, in tears of heartfelt pleaſure, a compenſation for thoſe of bitterneſs and miſery which have flowed with ſuch profuſion from my eyes? I will not however ſoften your feeling hearts into a haſty compliance with my wiſhes, which may not prove, juſt at this time, wholly convenient to the worthy Mr. Howard. I will truſt to your affection to expedite your viſit as ſoon as you can, and till I enjoy the happineſs of ſeeing you, do not fear that I am either ſolitary or deſponding; no, on the contrary, be aſſured I am grateful, contented, and happy. I have at preſent the pleaſure of Sir William and my dear aunt's company, who will not leave me for ſome time. My doors are never ſhut againſt thoſe in my neighbourhood who favour me with their viſits, without exacting a ſcrupulous return; and my mind is at eaſe while I reſt aſſured of the love and attachment of thoſe dear and amiable children who are ſo entirely poſſeſſed of mine.

Dear and ever valued Lady Aubrey! With what delight ſhall we fulfil our promiſe. Mr. Howard's buſineſs will detain him a fortnight longer; but I have written that if any more delays intervene, and my ſiſter continues well, I ſhall undoubtedly make the journey by myſelf.

H. SEYMOUR.

LETTER XVIII.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

JUNE 15.

I WILL not anticipate, Sophia. But why is fortune ſo induſtrious in throwing accidents in my way which prove the utmoſt exertion of my reſolution?

Yeſterday Miſs Patty Heathcote walked up in the morning, to inform us that a ſet of ſtrolling players had lately arrived in the little village near us; that they had fitted up their theatre in a barn, where for ſome preceding evenings they had performed ſome of the beſt plays, much to the ſatisfaction, ſaid ſhe innocently, of *very excellent judges*; and that as neither ſhe nor her mother had ever ſeen a play, they would take it as a *prodigious favour indeed* if Mr. and Mrs. Howard and I would do them the honour to go and make a party with them.

The little girl's eyes, while ſhe delivered this meſſage, ſparkled with an eagerneſs which perſuaded Mr. Howard at once to agree to the meaſure, and made me really anxious for its ſucceſs; and Fanny, who with the ſedate character of a ſober married woman preſerves all the innocent eagerneſs of ſeventeen, is always ſo much delighted with any frolic, that ſhe was deſirous of going the inſtant it was propoſed.

As

As the village is ſcarce a mile and an half diſtant, and it was bright moon light, it was agreed that the whole party ſhould walk to and from the theatre, concluding that the performance would not detain us very late; myſelf excepted, whom Mr. Howard inſiſted on carrying thither in his little equipage, as walking, after my late accident, might prove hurtful, my foot, though almoſt well, being ſtill weak. Miſs Patty ran full ſpeed down the hill, breathleſs with expectation to equip herſelf for the play-houſe, and to requeſt that her father and mother and all the children old enough to accompany them, would aſſemble at Hubert Hill to dinner, from whence we ſhould all ſet off together.

The labours of the toilet are little known in the rural world; and Nature has ſo laviſhly decked this happy innocent family with roſy cheeks, ſparkling eyes, and ſmiling countenances, that they are as unneceſſary as unknown. An hour after, we beheld the good parſon and his wife aſcending the hill, followed by five of their children; and no maſked ball or birth night aſſembly ever occaſioned more entertainment and delight than did this excurſion to our ruſtic theatre.

We ſet off at half paſt four, for the children would not ceaſe teizing us till we were on foot; and having arrived a full hour too ſoon, took poſſeſſion of the front bench, which in this play houſe might be denominated the ſtage boxes, being the moſt convenient place in the barn for ſeeing the performance.

We had not been long ſeated, before ſeveral gentlemen entered, the moſt of whom by their dreſs appeared to be officers. Miſs Patty informed

formed me they belonged to a company at preſent quartered in the village; but as the place was but indifferently lighted up it was not eaſy immediately to diſtinguiſh their faces.

They had not engaged my attention above a few moments, when my companion, Miſs Patty, aſked me in a whiſper if I did not think that gentleman in the dark coloured coat, the handſomeſt young man I had ever ſeen; and turning to where ſhe pointed, I beheld Mr. Roatſley leaning againſt one of the ſide ſcenes, engaged in converſation with ſome gentlemen.

You may eaſily imagine I was in a tremor; and I had not an inſtant given me to compoſe or recollect myſelf, when I perceived Mr. Bradſhaw approach him, and gently pulling him by the arm, whiſper ſomething in his ear, which made him at once change colour and glance his eyes with eagerneſs around the houſe. Captain Bradſhaw juſt then made me a reſpectful bow; and his friend taking the reference of his look, inſtantly followed his example, with an expreſſion in his countenance of ſatisfaction and delight which I fear almoſt conveyed equal pleaſure into mine. He came directly up to me, and paid me his compliments with a politeneſs not however unmixed with confuſion; while on my part, the recollection of Mrs. Hindon's letter, the obligation for which my avowed acknowledgments were due, and the ſecret humiliating benefit I knew he had intended to beſtow, threw an awkwardneſs and conſtraint over my reception of him which I could not for ſome time either conquer or conceal.

Happily Mr. Howard immediately joined us; and by addreſſing himſelf to Roatſley, gave me a momentary relief. Perceiving I ſeemed at a loſs,

loſs, he partly comprehended the cauſe; and kindly paved the way for my acknowledgments by entering at once on the ſubject. I did myſelf the pleaſure of writing to you, Mr. Roatſley, ſaid he, ſome time ago, but as I have not been favoured with an anſwer——

I ſhould not have failed moſt certainly in ſeizing the earlieſt opportunity of acknowledging any letter of your's, returned he, had I been conſcious of the favour; but I have been making a little excurſion of late, and having no fixed abode, I ſuppoſe they knew not where to forward my letters, as I was ſo negligent as to leave no orders about them.

Nay, Sir, had you really been guilty of any omiſſion, no apology was neceſſary to me; for I acted but as amanuenſis to my fair ſiſter: and my letter was only intended to expreſs her acknowledgments added to my own, for the polite attention with which you have intereſted yourſelf in her affairs.

A deep bluſh overſpread the countenance of Mr. Roatſley at this ſpeech, and an embarraſſment took poſſeſſion of his features little inferior to my own when I added, that he muſt have concluded me extremely ungrateful to have ſo long deferred returning my very ſincere thanks, for an obligation which ſhould always induce me to conſider myſelf as particularly indebted to him.

His confuſion was now augmented: and bowing, he ſtammered not a little while he repeated—what pleaſure he muſt receive—how delighted he muſt be—and how happy he ſhould think himſelf to be of the ſmalleſt ſervice to Miſs Seymour.

He

He then returned to addreſs himſelf to Mr. Bradſhaw, as if anxious to change the ſubject; and juſt at that inſtant perceiving my ſiſter, for whom he had not even enquired, he left me to pay his compliments to her; but ſoon returning, he entered immediately on a new topic, enquired how I had amuſed myſelf in the country during the winter, aſked if I could really leave town at that gay ſeaſon without the ſlighteſt regret, and placed himſelf next me, where there happened fortunately to be a vacant ſeat. His late confuſion now gave way to a gaiety and animation which convinced me that the ceremony of diſtant and occaſional meetings had not hitherto allowed of that eaſy intimacy between us, which developes without conſtraint or diſguiſe the real temper of mind. My conſcious feelings had always thrown a reſerve over my own manner to Mr. Roatſley, which could not fail to affect his; but the unexpected ſatisfaction of this ſudden rencontre had given to both a flow of ſpirits that would not be reſtrained, and which while it wholly baniſhed Lady Elizabeth Sedley from my recollection, preſented Roatſley in a point of view entirely new and ſtill more inſinuating. I had before admired him as a character of real and unaſſuming dignity. The amiable ſoftneſs of his addreſs had charmed me; and all I ſaw, and all I heard of his diſpoſition, (however combated at times by pique and diſpleaſure), had ſerved but to augment my eſteem. I had conſidered him as rather of a grave turn of mind: this evening however, the early part of it at leaſt, fully ſatisfied me of my error. He was not merely in good ſpirits, but lively and animated beyond meaſure, and his friend Captain Bradſhaw, who joined

joined us, and who really is a very agreeable young man, added to the gaiety and life of the party.

The commencement of the play, which by the way was King Lear, put a period for a ſhort time to this general chat. But the performance was ſo miſerable, that it was impoſſible to pay attention to it, and Mr. Roatſley again addreſſed himſelf in converſation to me. He ſoon recurred to my leaving town, and talked of it with the moſt flattering regret. I ſhall not do you the injuſtice to ſuppoſe, ſaid he, that poſſeſſing in yourſelf thoſe never-failing reſources which give defiance to vapours and ennui, you could either endure much regret on leaving the mere amuſements of the town, or ſuffer from vacancy or languor on returning to the country; but early in March, every thing around is ſo bleak, and the communication between one neighbour and another ſo often impeded by bad roads or bad weather, that a comfortable, agreeable ſociety, in which (after all our various ways of purſuing pleaſure), it muſt be confeſſed our firſt enjoyment conſiſts, is leſs practicable in the country than in town; beſides moſt people are of that opinion, and the country of courſe muſt have been quite deſerted when you arrived in it.

Yes, anſwered I; but when I retired to Hubert Hill I was ſo ſingularly ſituated as to carry along with me the only friends to whom, at leaſt in this part of the world, I can lay claim, and they were ſuch as muſt have enlivened and endeared the moſt diſmal and uncomfortable ſpot.

After ſuch a declaration, I muſt not preſume to enquire of whom this enviable party conſiſted.

You

You ſafely may, ſaid I, ſince my brother and ſiſter conſtituted the whole.

And is your heart, Miſs Seymour, ſo entirely engroſſed by theſe friends, amiable and deſerving as they are, that no place is left in it for the numbers who muſt have mourned your abſence?

When I left London, ſaid I with a ſudden warmth, which the recollection of our forlorn ſituation forcibly excited, it contained not one human ſoul, who, had they been certain they ſhould have beheld me no more, would have endured one moment's regret.

The idea was ſo melancholy, that a tear ſtarted into my eye, not I'm afraid unſeen by Roatſley, for he inſtantly replied—Ah! Miſs Seymour, that is wholly and utterly impoſſible. Thoſe who are formed by nature for charming their own ſex and enchanting our's, cannot fail of converting into friends and admirers all bleſt with the happineſs of their acquaintance.

This compliment, pronounced in a voice of mixed eagerneſs and ſoftneſs, could not fail to confuſe me: and unable to make a proper reply, or to diſclaim a compliment much too flattering even for acknowledgment, I could only reply with much heſitation—Oh! Mr. Roatſley, how can you poſſibly imagine—beſides you know I am quite a ſtranger in England.

Lovelineſs, continued he in the ſame ſtrain, is an object too intereſting to mankind in general to prove a ſtranger in any quarter of the globe. Where there are ſouls to feel its influence, it muſt be felt with force and energy irreſiſtible.

To this an anſwer was ſtill more impoſſible, and I did not attempt it. Finding I was ſilent—

I have the pleaſure of conſidering myſelf, ſaid he, after a pauſe, as your firſt Engliſh acquaintance. Will you not then allow me the inexpreſſible happineſs of a place in this envied liſt of your friends? Be aſſured I ſhall yield to none in the intereſt I hold in your welfare.

The warmth of his expreſſions, and ſtill more the eagerneſs of his countenance, covered me with bluſhes, and I could only reply by a ſlight bow of acknowledgment. I took courage at length to add, that the obligations I owed him ſufficiently proved his claim to be conſidered in that light.

This converſation naturally led him, with a gaiety that ſoon baniſhed my conſcious confuſion, to mention the circumſtances of our firſt meeting, from which, by an eaſy tranſition, he proceeded to talk upon many intereſting topics. In the courſe of this diſcourſe, I was not a little ſurpriſed to hear him mention Lord Belmont's name more than once with the moſt unconſcious ingenuouſneſs, and found myſelf ſtill more bewildered when I perceived he ſeemed even deſirous of drawing from me every circumſtance relating to my ſituation abroad that he could contrive, without an appearance of impertinent curioſity, to obtain.

Various were the particulars into which he had the addreſs, tho' with the utmoſt politeneſs, to penetrate. I was aſtoniſhed and confounded by his behaviour, yet I ſtill remained convinced that his ignorance was feigned: and while I anſwered ſimply and naturally to all his enquiries, pride made me diſdain to force him to an explanation, which muſt detect his duplicity, and cover him with confuſion.

At

At length—your accent is ſo little defective, Miſs Seymour, ſaid he, that it is difficult for me to believe you never were in England till now.

I left it ſo very young, replied I, that I have not the moſt diſtant recollection of ever having been in it.

Having quitted it ſo very early, is equivalent to your never having been in it. But I always underſtood, Miſs Seymour, that France had had the honour of your birth.

Aſtoniſhed, and entirely off my guard at this ſpeech, I involuntarily exclaimed—Good Heavens! Mr. Roatſley, how can you ſay ſo? Is it poſſible you can affect this ignorance.

Ignorance! repeated he. Little as I have had the happineſs of enjoying your company, and ſhort as has been the period of our acquaintance, it is not ſurpriſing that I ſhould be ignorant of this as well as of a thouſand other circumſtances into which I have never had the preſumption to enquire, however anxious my deſire of information has been.

Are you indeed ſerious, cried I; for inexplicable as it appeared, I now perceived that all was as yet a ſecret to him.

Never more ſo than at this moment. But why ſhould it aſtoniſh you ſo much? Is it not the natural conſequence of——

Becauſe, cried I, interrupting him, I have believed till this inſtant that you were as perfectly well informed of every circumſtance of my birth and education as the moſt intimate of my friends can be, or as I myſelf am.

My ignorance, be aſſured, anſwered he, has reſulted neither from want of anxiety nor want of exertion to obtain information; but ſimply

that from your recent arrival in this country your circle of acquaintance was not extenſive, and none ſeemed more in the ſecret than myſelf. Miſs Seymour cannot ſuppoſe that where ſhe appeared ſhe could remain diſregarded and unnoticed. Various were the accounts relating to her that reached my ears; but they were uniformly vague and unſatisfactory, and I am convinced void of foundation. Since however the fate of my enquiries appears to you ſo extraordinary, I hope you will not think my earneſt requeſt of an explanation too preſuming. Under the happy title juſt now granted me may I dare to venture on ſuch a demand?

Amazement, ſatisfaction, and a variety of other emotions, at once ſo powerfully aſſailed me, that for a few moments I could not articulate; and grew ſo ſuddenly pale, that Roatſley haſtily applied to Miſs Patty for her ſmelling bottle; who, extremely frightened, was about to have alarmed my ſiſter and the reſt of the party, had I not recollected myſelf, and aſſured her my indiſpoſition was ſlight and already gone off. To any other perſon my countenance might have diſcovered that my ſpirits were more affected than my health; but engroſſed with the novelty of the performance, which had now advanced to the beginning of the ſecond act, my young companion had not given the ſlighteſt attention to our converſation, and having been often told I ſuppoſe that fine ladies were vapouriſh and hyſterical, did not ſeem either ſuſpicious or ſurpriſed.

Far otherwiſe were the concluſions of Mr. Roatſley. Shocked and confounded, he began to apprehend a myſtery, to unravel which he had not received the ſlighteſt hint or aſſiſtance.

I am

I am in the agonies of the moſt painful ſuſpenſe, ſaid he after a pauſe: but ſince the ſubject is ſo diſtreſſing, I am contented, nay even eager to remain in ignorance.

You ſhall be informed of every thing you may deſire to know, ſaid I, when I found myſelf a little recovered; but at preſent all explanation is impoſſible. A few words will not ſuffice; and even if they ſhould, I am incapable myſelf of entering on the ſubject.

From whom then, will you allow me to expect it?

From my brother, Mr. Howard. He will tell you all.

All! repeated he, ſtill more confounded. The ſolemnity of the phraſe almoſt alarms me.

The entrance of a large party of gentlemen and ladies juſt at this inſtant created a noiſe and buſtle which carried our eyes to the door. Good God! exclaimed Roatſley in a tone of vexation; and I inſtantly diſcovered Lady Mary Lawrence, her niece Lady Elizabeth, Miſs Dudley, and in ſhort the whole party at Holtenham, (Lady Linroſe and Miſs Lucy Dudley excepted), eſcorted by Sir Edward Sudbury and ſeveral other young men.

As we had taken poſſeſſion of the front bench, ſeats for ſo many people occaſioned ſome confuſion. That on which we were placed could not contain above one half of the ladies, it being already more than half filled; and though the one behind was almoſt empty, having been purpoſely kept for the more faſhionable part of the audience, they ſeemed to diſdain occupying it, and ſtood ſome time very civilly expreſſing their diſappointment aloud with the expectation that our party would riſe and give them place.

This

This act of politeneſs, however, we had no ſort of intention of performing. Indeed, for myſelf, the haughty preſumption of their behaviour would have deterred me from taking any ſteps towards their accommodation; but at preſent the unexpected appearance of Lady Elizabeth, who for an hour before had not once obtruded on my mind, now wholly baniſhed that pleaſing ſatisfaction and inward complacency which the knowledge that Roatſley had not yet deſerted us diffuſed over my feelings. I was ſunk and diſpirited, and not in the leaſt diſpoſed to be civil and attentive to any of this faſhionable ſet, Lady Mary excepted, who came up to my ſiſter, and addreſſed us with her uſual good breeding and affability.

Miſs Dudley, a few minutes after ſhe entered, perceiving her brother, who had riſen to pay his reſpects to the ladies, immediately called out—Lord brother, when did you arrive in this part of the world?

Only laſt night, returned he. I came to ſpend a few days with Bradſhaw at his quarters, and he brought me hither for the purpoſe of encouraging theſe poor people. I did not expect to find ſo much good company, nor to meet with ſo many of my friends.

Nay, anſwered ſhe, we never ſhould have thought of coming to this poor little place, which muſt be a ſad, ſtupid affair, but it ſeems the man who dignifies himſelf with the title of manager, prayed Lady Mary ſo hard to patronize them, that out of mere compaſſion ſhe beſpoke the play, and inſiſted we ſhould all attend her.

Lady Elizabeth juſt then advancing, exclaimed in a tone of impatience loud enough to be heard all

all over the houſe—Lard, only think of theſe people having taken our places; and preſently perceiving me—how do you do, Miſs Seymour? cried ſhe with a careleſs air; and without waiting a reply, continued in my hearing to expreſs her wonder, *what the people could mean.*

Her harangue was all at once interrupted by the unexpected ſight of Mr. Roatſley, who came forward to pay her his compliments. I watched what effect this ſudden meeting might produce in the countenances of both, and remarked that they mutually reddened extremely at the rencontre; but while Roatſley addreſſed himſelf to her with a reſpectful but diſtant air, her manner to him appeared to betray an over acted diſplay of dignity and reſerve. She recovered her little embarraſſment very ſpeedily however; for ſhe immediately recurred to her ſcornful expreſſions of ſurpriſe, and repeated her complaints to him, who politely offered her the place he had juſt quitted by me.

No, cried ſhe careleſsly, I can't be divided from my party.

Had your Ladyſhip engaged places? ſaid he.

O Lord, no. How ſhould one think of ſuch a thing in ſuch a place as this! But when the people came to ſolicit us to go, they told us the firſt bench ſhould be reſerved for any people of faſhion who might take it into their heads to come, and behold all the parſons wives and daughters I believe in the country have aſſembled to take poſſeſſion of the only tolerable places in the barn.

Roatſley looked by no means pleaſed at this rude ſpeech, which he knew I could not but overhear, and replied with quickneſs—But as your

your Ladyſhip can't ſuppoſe any of the ladies will give up their ſeats, I would adviſe you to accept of mine.

Mr. Howard and the good Doctor having by this time riſen to accommodate the company, and placed ſome of the children behind, room was at length made for them; and by this arrangement Roatſley was once more placed next me, with Lady Elizabeth on his other hand.

Her Ladyſhip choſe not to favour me with any further notice during the remainder of the evening; and Miſs Dudley, who did not even afford me the civility of a diſtant bow, ſat with her eyes fixed on the ſpot where her brother was placed, whom ſhe examined with an aſpect of ſuch ill humour and diſpleaſure, every time he addreſſed himſelf to me, that I felt beyond meaſure uneaſy.

She had not the ſmalleſt reaſon, however, to dread or even to ſuſpect any aſſiduity on his part towards me; for his behaviour was now totally changed. He looked grave, thoughtful, and abſorbed. The little he ſaid was forced and conſtrained; and his attentions were divided with the moſt ſcrupulous exactneſs equally between Lady Elizabeth and myſelf.

Her admirer, or rather her attendant, Sir Edward, under pretence of avoiding to crowd her, inſiſted on relinquiſhing a place her Ladyſhip had procured him immediately behind her, and teized me not a little, (for it muſt be owned I was not in the beſt humour), by ſtanding at my ſide with his uſual ſolicitude, and entering into converſation with me. I was leſs than ever in a mood for liſtening to him, particularly as I obſerved that Roatſley lent an attentive ear to all that paſſed between us: the purport of which con-

conſiſted in much anxiety in regard to my accident, and at length in an explicit but diffident requeſt that I would allow him the honour of viſiting me at Hubert Hill, and would favour him with an introduction to Mr. Howard, whom he ſaid he had never been ſo fortunate as to meet at Mrs. Hindon's.

The recollection of his behaviour on a certain occaſion, rendered a refuſal, or even an evaſion of this demand, impoſſible, though the unbounded ſatisfaction he teſtified on my compliance, made me ſpeedily apprehend that I ought not to have conſented, and induced me to fear I had granted more than I deſigned by the introduction.

He and Mr. Roatſley ſeemed intimately acquainted. Between the acts they joined each other, and continued in earneſt converſation; and from the gravity of the one countenance, and the too apparent exultation of the other, I could not avoid ſuſpecting that Sir Edward was confeſſing his ſanguine expectations to his friend. You ſmile at my vanity, Sophia; but the attentions of this young man are ſo pointed and undiſguiſed, that they attract univerſal approbation wherever I meet him; though my manner, (uniformly as reſerved as good breeding will allow it to be), teſtifies as plainly as words almoſt could do, how little I am gratified by his notice.

Lady Elizabeth, deprived of the devoirs of one admirer, and not much ſoothed by the cold politeneſs of another, laviſhed all her ſmiles, good humour, and condeſcenſion, upon a young man of a very ſingular appearance, who ſat on her left hand, and who ſeemed ſo entirely to atone for the neglect of the others, that I per-

ceived her ſuppoſed partiality to Sir Edward was merely the indiſcriminate love of flattery and admiration. Her preſent lover, (for ſuch his aſſiduities evidently confeſſed him to be), I was informed poſſeſſed a ſplendid fortune, and was of diſtinguiſhed rank, but his name I have forgot. He was dreſſed in the common ſtile of a groom or horſe-jockey, and his hair, cut ſhort behind, hung about his ears with a negligence which betrayed not only diſreſpect for the company, but a total diſregard both of cleanlineſs and propriety; yet an air of conſcious conſequence, and a very handſome figure, which he tried in vain to diſguiſe, betrayed his latent importance. He ſeemed poſſeſſed of exuberant ſpirits; for his Lordſhip and Lady Elizabeth, by their talking and laughing, gave great offence and occaſioned much diſturbance to the ruſtic part of the audience, who were not ſo refined as to deſpiſe the performance, but on the contrary enjoyed it with all the reliſh of novelty.

The actors indeed were ſo miſerably bad, that the whole exhibition had infinitely more the appearance of the Comic than of the Tragic Muſe; and attending to it was ſo little intereſting, and in my ſituation of mind ſo impoſſible, that I ought not to blame her Ladyſhip for endeavouring to draw amuſements from another channel, eſpecially as I myſelf followed her example moſt part of the evening; but there was an unfeeling and unpardonable indelicacy in teſtifying with ſo little diſguiſe the ridicule which the poor people who were labouring for our amuſement excited, and the burſts of ungovernable laughter, and ſevere raillery, that reached their ears from this polite party, was a mortification in which I would not for worlds have joined.

joined. I had the ſatisfaction of perceiving that Roatſley was equally ſhocked at their behaviour: and not only applauded wherever any particular expectation of approbation was betrayed, but engaged all the gentlemen round him to drown, by every teſtimony of ſatisfaction, the hiſſing with which Lady Elizabeth's gay admirer frequently aſſailed the performers.

All particular converſation was at an end between Roatſley and me from the moment of Lady Elizabeth's appearance; and that which had preceded her entrance, by perplexing and engroſſing us, had mutually unfitted us for diſcourſing on thoſe little trifles that uſually preſent themſelves as topics of general diſcuſſion. He ſeemed ſo evidently oppreſſed with ſomething that lay uneaſily on his mind, that I could not poſſibly conclude mere curioſity to have excited an impreſſion ſo apparently unſurmountable; and ſoothed and gratified as I had been in the beginning of the evening, I ſoon began to ſuſpect that he regarded with pain and diſpleaſure the coquetry of Lady Elizabeth's behaviour. He often fixed his eyes upon her for ſome moments together with a look of ſcrutiny and inveſtigation, ſeemed to watch every word and movement that eſcaped her, and though he ſeldom addreſſed himſelf to her, to *me* he attended ſtill leſs. He appeared indeed wholly abſorbed by his own reflections; and ſcarce could I trace the ſame inſinuating manner, which but one half hour before had delighted me ſo much.

The pain of this obſervation, which ſtrengthened every moment, convinced me I had been unconſciouſly deluding myſelf with falſe and chimerical hopes. If Lady Elizabeth was indifferent to him, why did her conduct ſo evidently

dently affect and diſpleaſe him; if his chains were heavy and his heart unconcerned, her preſent conduct was preciſely what he ought to have deſired and enjoyed; and if his eager profeſſions of regard and friendſhip for me were as warm and potent as I wiſhed them, whence came this ſudden languor and reſerve, when by an act of confidence I was about to give him a proof of my eſteem?

There was but one way of ſolving theſe inconſiſtencies, and it was blindneſs not to perceive it: involved in an engagement, with the ſplendid advantages of which probably he was himſelf dazzled, he had reſolved to purſue the path ſo anxiouſly pointed out to him by his family, while the folly and inſipidity of the object of his vows, without operating ſo violently as to deter him from his purpoſe, ſhocked his feelings and opened his eyes to the dangers of fulfilling it.

Theſe reflections only ſerved to ſhew me that redoubled exertions were required to fortify my mind againſt the weakneſs of my heart; and I began to form a ſecret plan of mental rigour which I flattered myſelf muſt in time reſtore the tranquillity I had loſt.

Sufficient time was given me for theſe good reſolutions; for Sir Edward on the one hand had been called away by Mr. Bradſhaw, and Roatſley on the other preſerved his determined ſilence ſo reſolutely, that I had no apprehenſion of any interruption. The return of the former, however, at length forced me to give a conſtrained attention to his converſation; but finding that to affect a gaiety foreign to my feelings was beyond meaſure irkſome and inſupportable in my preſent frame of mind, yet conſcious I could

could not too ſoon drive from my thoughts a crowd of flattering retroſpections, which ſometimes for an inſtant baniſhed my deſpondency and occaſioned a new conflict, I endeavoured, as an eſcape both from Sir Edward and myſelf, to lend an ear to the play, the pathetic beauties of which not even the miſerable deficiencies of the performers could wholly obſcure.

The player who appeared in the character of Gloſter, happened to be in fact blind; a circumſtance which, as his voice was good and his action much ſuperior to that of his companions, rendered him an intereſting and moſt melancholy object. In the fourth act, when the unexpected meeting between Gloſter and his ſon takes place, the pathos and feeling with which the unhappy father exclaimed—

——Oh dear ſon Edgar!
The food of thy abuſed father's wrath!
Might I but live to *ſee* thee in my *touch*,
I'd ſay I had eyes again—

affected me ſo poignantly, that I could not command my tears. In this however I was not ſingular; for I perceived Roatſley equally ſoftened: nothing indeed could be more mournful than the ſcene before us, nor could any ſound have appeared more inhuman than a loud and childiſh fit of laughter, which juſt at that inſtant burſt from Lady Elizabeth. Good Heavens! cried ſhe to her admirer, if the people an't crying. Nay that is too ridiculous indeed. Pray do look, Mr. Roatſley, turning to him—pray for God's ſake obſerve the tears; how ſoft and pretty all this is.

He gave her no reply; but regarding me for a moment, who on this occaſion was the particular

ticular object of her obſervation and ridicule, a ſigh eſcaped him that ſeemed to be vented from the heart, and he again ſet himſelf to liſten to the play with the anxiety of a perſon who wiſhed to avoid all interruption.

When all was concluded, Mr. Bradſhaw came up and enquired how I had been entertained. The performance on the whole, ſaid he, was ſuch as might have been expected, but that little ſtroke of Gloſter's was truly pathetic.

Lady Elizabeth, who did not diſtinctly hear what he ſaid, choſe to join in the converſation, though ſhe continued to preſerve towards me the ſame contemptuous diſregard, and demanded of what he was talking?

I was mentioning to Miſs Seymour, cried he, the circumſtance of the poor fellow who played Gloſter.

Oh yes! cried ſhe, inconſiderately, I never laughed ſo much in my life.

It is an excellent jeſt to the poor blind devil, returned he ſarcaſtically, to be deprived of ſight; and being conſtrained in that diſmal ſtate to make ſuch exertions for ſubſiſtence is a ſtill better one.

Lord I don't mean ſo, for that certainly muſt be quite dreadful to be ſure; only I was vaſtly amuſed ſeeing the people pretend to cry, when undoubtedly the whole affair was more like a farce than any thing elſe.

There is Roatſley; returned Mr. Bradſhaw, who appears as much dejected as if he had been weeping the tender woes of Belvidera when performed by the inimitable Mrs. Siddons, and Miſs Seymour too looks not only as if ſhe had been crying, but as if ſhe could cry for an hour to come.

I merely

I merely look as if I was fatigued, and half aſleep, cried I.

How unfortunate muſt I be in my choice of topics, anſwered he with a ſmile; for twice have I endured the mortification of learning from Miſs Seymour's lips that I had ſet her aſleep. Pray are *you* half aſleep too, cried he, turning to Roatſley, are *you* infected with Miſs Seymour's lethargic diſorder? Indeed if I may be allowed, (lowering his voice), to judge from appearances, I ſhould pronounce you affected with ſimilar ſymptoms.

This ſpeech, pronounced with an expreſſion of the moſt cruel archneſs, and of which I did not loſe a ſyllable, hurt me ſeverely. The moſt painful confuſion dyed my cheeks, and I had not courage for ſome moments to look up, leſt I ſhould encounter the eyes of Roatſley; and I believe he was equally confounded and embarraſſed, for he made no anſwer, and a ſhort ſilence ſucceeded, which was beyond meaſure awkward and diſtreſſing.

This was ſoon interrupted by Bradſhaw, who appeared rather to have enjoyed than regretted the mutual confuſion he had occaſioned. Miſs Seymour, cried he, I was extremely ſorry I was obliged to leave Holtenham without having the happineſs of again ſeeing you. I wiſhed much to enquire how you had reſted, and longed particularly to know of you if you had diſcovered the ſolution of the enigma I gave you to unriddle.

I have even forgot that you gave me any enigma to ſolve, ſaid I; and as I raiſed my eyes to anſwer him with as much indifference as I could aſſume, I perceived Roatſley's eyes were fixed on my face with an expreſſion of earneſt penetration

tion that wholly diſconcerted me; happily, however, my ſiſter, from whom by the accidental change of places I had been ſeparated juſt then joined us; and ſome previous conſultation in regard to our mode of departure relieved me from further perſecution.

The evening, though a little cool, was pleaſant, and walking, had I been able for it, was the method of travelling I ſhould have preferred; but my ſiſter, who in her rural ſituation retains the embers of latent vanity, was much provoked by the contempt and haughty inſolence with which our humble party had been treated by the proud train from Holtenham, and was not a little mortified at the idea of being obliged to find her way through a crowd of powdered footmen and magnificent equipages to go home on foot with the Parſon and his wife: while this faſhionable company were leaving the ruſtic theatre with as much eclat and parade as had attended their entrance, followed by all the gay male part of the audience. She therefore determined to remain till the laſt, and whiſperingly informed me of the reaſon; though Mr. Howard and the good Doctor, who were far from ſuſpecting this plan, urged her to be gone, as it began to grow late, and there was no apparent reaſon for delay.

Poor Fanny, aſhamed to confeſs this ſpark of ſecret pride, which would have appeared wholly incomprehenſible to the one, and perhaps rather abſurd to the other, was put to great difficulties in order to compleat her project; but ſhe was reſolved to ſave herſelf this little humiliation if poſſible. Mrs. Heathcote's care for herſelf and children, gave her likewiſe much pain. The good woman wrapt them all carefully up in large

large thick cloaks and handkerchiefs brought for the purpoſe, till they exactly reſembled Ruſſian boors in the prints of travellers; and beſought Fanny in a voice loud enough to be heard all over the houſe, to make herſelf warm, for *walking home* in the *night air* was extremely apt to give people colds; and indeed Mrs. Howard, though this cloak is old and a little worn out, it is thick and comfortable, and I wiſh you would allow me to wrap it round you.

All this was the more ſevere on poor Fanny's irritable feelings, as Lady Mary's carriage, which had occaſioned her ſome little delay, juſt then being announced, her Ladyſhip in paſſing ſtopped to bid her good night; and Lady Elizabeth following, eſcorted by her gay admirer, looked with a ſmile of ridicule but half ſuppreſſed, at the appearance of our companions.

Roatſley, who had been called away by his ſiſter, had returned but a moment before: but perceiving Lady Mary unattended, again left me to conduct her to her carriage, having firſt beſought the honour of ſeeing me to mine, and requeſted that I would not depart till his return. This circumſtance rendered me fully as anxious as my ſiſter to delay our going, while I was no leſs aſhamed to acknowledge the cauſe.

My dear, cried Mr. Howard to Fanny on coming up to us, for Heavens ſake let us be gone. We ſhall loſe the advantage of the moon if we are not directly on foot. It is already on its decline.

I was ſilent; and ſhe only replied by ſaying ſhe ſhould go preſently.

Unconſcious of our ſecret views, he could only attribute to a childiſh deſire of outſtaying the company, our unwillingneſs to depart, and

inſiſted

inſiſted on ſetting off immediately with me, leaving his wife under the care of the good Parſon, with whoſe family ſhe was to walk home.

My ſiſter, much pleaſed with this plan, which left her motions in her own power, urged me to go; and ſevere as it was to leave the houſe before Roatſley's return, before he had finally adjuſted at what time and in what place he was to receive the communication ſo much deſired, I was abſolutely conſtrained to allow Sir Edward to lead me to the little carriage. Had I been perfectly unconſcious of any ſecret intereſt beyond that anxiety which I felt in common with my ſiſter to be on terms of intimacy with a relation ſo amiable, I ſhould undoubtedly have acquainted Mr. Howard with my wiſh to remain, and acknowledged the cauſe; but the particulars were too long for immediate diſcuſſion at that moment, and on that ſpot, where Sir Edward never for an inſtant left my ſide: afraid therefore to diſcover an eagerneſs too keen, eſpecially before Mr. Bradſhaw, of whoſe animadverſions I was extremely apprehenſive, I permitted Mr. Howard in ſilence to place himſelf by me, and we drove off.

On ſtepping in, I perceived by the glare of the flambeau, Roatſley in earneſt converſation with Lady Elizabeth at the window of Lady Mary's carriage, and he ſtill ſtood in the ſame place when I loſt ſight of him.

When we got home, Fanny being longer in making her appearance than we expected, Mr. Howard grew at length uneaſy, and went himſelf to ſee after the walking party. Finding myſelf alone, I threw myſelf on a chair, and giving way to a train of reflections which alternately

nately ſoothed and tormented me, I indulged unconſciouſly in a fit of muſing which ſoftened rather than relieved me.

But I haſtily conclude this letter, having an immediate opportunity of ſending it to my Sophia.

Adieu.

H. SEYMOUR.

LETTER XIX.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

JUNE 16.

OH my dear friend, my aſtoniſhment and joy are unſpeakable. I had remained alone about half an hour, my mind diſtracted with a thouſand thoughts, when I was rouſed from my reverie by hearing the great door below open; and condemning myſelf ſeverely for a gratification ſo weak, dangerous, and improper, I haſtily tried to compoſe my features, and roſe to meet the company; when inſtead of the Heathcote family whom I had expected, Mr. Howard and my ſiſter entered, attended—conceive my aſtoniſhment Sophia—by Roatſley himſelf.

After diſregarding your promiſe of waiting my return, Miſs Seymour, cried he, probably you did not expect I ſhould ſo ſoon make my appearance to reproach you: but though I believe I have

I have ſome engagement or other with Bradſhaw this evening, I found myſelf quite unable to withſtand Mrs. Howard's kind and preſſing invitation to ſup here. The remembrance of the delightful evening I ſpent at Dover (which I ſhall ever regard as one of the happieſt of my life) renders the temptation wholly irreſiſtible.

His appearance did indeed agitate and ſurpriſe me beyond meaſure; nor could I conjecture how it had taken place, at ſuch an hour and at a juncture ſo unexpected, till Fanny in a low voice contrived to inform me, that in purſuance of her projected plan of operations ſhe had deferred leaving the theatre as long as with propriety ſhe could, and indeed I ſuſpect rather longer; for ſhe owned all the ladies were gone and only a few ſtraggling gentlemen continued to ſaunter about. Captain Bradſhaw, however, ſtill kept by her ſide; and Roatſley returning, heard with evident marks of diſappointment that I was already gone.

Perceiving my ſiſter's unaccountable delay, he naturally concluded that her carriage was not arrived, and politely aſked leave to ſee after it. Fanny, more and more embarraſſed, now beheld the total defeat of all her ſecret ſchemes to avoid detection, and was at length obliged to confeſs that as the way was ſo *very ſhort* and the night ſo *very pleaſant*, ſhe thought walking by far the moſt agreeable way of returning; after which declaration wiſhing Roatſley a haſty good night, in hopes ſhe ſhould get rid of all the gentlemen, ſhe quickly led the way, accompanied, added ſhe in a tone of chagrin, by poor Mrs. Heathcote and the five children, all wrapt up like ſo many Egyptian mummies.

Roatſley however, with a politeneſs natural to him, followed, and offering his arm, begged

ſhe

ſhe would allow him the pleaſure of eſcorting her part of the way. With great civility and a profuſion of thanks, Mrs. Howard made violent reſiſtance; but in vain; Roatſley made his point good, and had attended her as far as the bottom of the hill when they were met by Mr. Howard, who could do no leſs you know than requeſt that he would walk forward and partake of a family ſupper at Hubert Hill. To this, after ſome heſitation, he conſented; and the parſon's family, having ſeen Fanny ſafe under her huſband's protection, very opportunely choſe to excuſe themſelves from accompanying her farther, and jumped one after another over the ſtyle which leads through the fields to the parſonage.

You cannot eaſily conceive, Sophia, after the train of ideas which had preceded his appearance, how ſingular and extraordinary it now appeared, when I recollected what pique and diſpleaſure his ſilence to Mr. Howard's letter had a few days before occaſioned me. I could ſcarce believe he was now at Hubert Hill; and when I contraſted his preſent flow of ſpirits with his dejected aſpect two hours before, every thing appeared myſterious and unaccountable.

Were my dear, dear Sophia now preſent, ſaid I to myſelf more than once during the evening, ſhe would confeſs that blind partiality has not guided my pen in my repreſentation of this amiable young man.

When our repaſt was concluded, Mr. Howard and Fanny, charmed to perceive their gueſt to all appearance fully as much pleaſed with their company as they were delighted with his, both joined in entreating him to accept of a bed here. To this ſome ſlight objections in regard

to

to inconvenience were on his part made, and eaſily overruled by the good lady of the manſion, who propoſed diſpatching Dubois to the village with orders to his ſervants and an apology to Mr. Bradſhaw; and in ſhort he at length complied. The wine and fruits being placed on a ſmall table before us, all ceremony and form ſeemed entirely diſcarded; and we chatted together with a ſocial familiarity and cheerfulneſs, which a long ſeries of occaſional meetings in town could never have produced. We were all in uncommon ſpirits; and Fanny, in the giddineſs of her mirth, let ſeveral little ſallies of *naivete* eſcape her which ſeemed extremely to pleaſe and amuſe her viſitor. Chance has hitherto ſo contrived it, that my ſiſter has ſeldom or never been much the object of Mr. Roatſley's attention; but he appeared this night to regard her in a point of view wholly new, and entered with much reliſh into the natural ſimplicity of her character.

As yet, however, nothing had been hinted relating to the propoſed explanation. Had Roatſley been tete a tete with any of the company, doubtleſs it would have been an eaſy matter to have led to the ſubject; but while the whole family were met together, to have enquired into particulars which from the agitation I had betrayed he could not but naturally conclude were of a very delicate nature, I doubt not muſt have appeared a preſumption for which he could not ſummon reſolution. Wholly unſuſpicious beſides how nearly he was himſelf intereſted in the tale, all he could poſſibly conjecture in regard to what he was to learn muſt have been, that in gratitude for the obligation he had procured me, I thought it incumbnet

bent he ſhould be made acquainted with certain circumſtances of my ſituation which he had reaſon to apprehend might prove a painful and not improbably a mortifying communication.

Silent therefore he continued on this topick, tho' moſt amuſing and agreeable on a thouſand others, till my ſiſter and I retired, which was not till after one in the morning, an hour unheard of in the ſober annals of Hubert Hill.

I did not ſhut my eyes for many hours after I went to bed. The diſtant murmur of the two gentlemen's voices below, who did not ſeparate till almoſt ſun riſe, engaged my conſtant attention; and a thouſand conjectures and reflections relating to the ſubject of their converſation, entirely baniſhed all inclination to reſt till about my uſual time of riſing, which at this ſeaſon is ſeldom after ſix. I then ſlept for a couple of hours; but finding it ſo late when I awoke, I haſtily roſe, and had but juſt finiſhed dreſſing, when Mr. Howard tapped at my chamber door requeſting me to follow him into my ſiſter's dreſſing room.

Impatient beyond meaſure to learn the ſubſtance of laſt night's converſation, I flew rather than run into the room, where I found Fanny almoſt as eager as myſelf.

Mr. Howard then related circumſtantially and minutely every word that had paſſed.

The moment we had left the parlour, Roatſley addreſſing himſelf to Mr. Howard, ſaid—to you, my dear Sir, I think it muſt be wholly unneceſſary to obſerve that to be but once in company with the amiable Mrs. Howard and her ſiſter without feeling the warmeſt intereſt in their happineſs and the moſt anxious ſolicitude to promote it to the utmoſt, is ſcarce poſſible;

ſible; that I have experienced the truth of this remark, I hope you do me the juſtice to believe, and——

Your conduct, Sir, interrupted Mr. Howard (to whom I had hinted the taſk that was likely to devolve upon him) fully evinces the warmth of your benevolence, and claims the juſt gratitude of all this family.

Talk not of gratitude, I entreat, cried he. If through the intereſt of my family I have been ſo fortunate as to render a ſlight ſervice to Miſs Seymour, damp not the pleaſure it gives me by attaching to it an idea of obligation it ſo little merits; or if (for you will find I am willing to make the very moſt of the favour) if I can flatter myſelf with having enjoyed the happineſs either of obliging Miſs Seymour, or on her account of having gratified *your* wiſhes, will you give me leave to point out to you how you may cancel the obligation at once and make me moſt ſincerely regard myſelf as *your* debtor?

If I have the *power*, Mr. Roatſley, returned Mr. Howard ſmiling, be aſſured the *will* is not wanting.

The power of granting my requeſt, I muſt conclude you are in full poſſeſſion of, ſince it is by permiſſion of Miſs Seymour I venture to make it; and allow me to premiſe, that without the ſanction of *her* approbation and conſent I certainly ſhould not have had the preſumption (however anxious) to demand particulars into which I have no title but from her indulgence and your's to penetrate. Will you however favour me ſo far as to inform me of ſuch circumſtances of her preſent and paſt ſituation, as may enable me to judge in what manner I may

may perhaps one day have it in my power really and eſſentially to ſerve her?

If your preſent enquiry reaches only to pecuniary matters, Sir, returned Mr. Howard, I have the pleaſure of aſſuring you that in regard to that circumſtance, Miſs Seymour's ſituation has never been ſo extremely uncomfortable as I have reaſon to believe was ſuggeſted to you. My wife's fortune, and her ſiſter's, amounted originally to twenty four thouſand pounds; but the ſudden death of their guardian, who had the ſole management of this money, and who has left his affairs in the moſt embarraſſed and involved ſituation, in all human probability will reduce the ſum to one tenth of its value. This certainly is a reverſe to be lamented; but the mind that is wholly untinctured with avarice, ſeldom allows ſuch mortifications to inflict a pang either deep or of long continuance, and I am certain it has never proved the ſource of more than a tranſient regret to either. Alas! human life is replete with diſtreſſes and anxieties which reach nearer to the heart, which pierce it in its tendereſt feelings, and wound it where it is moſt open to the attack; and diſappointments of this nature, againſt which both my wife and ſiſter have had to ſtruggle at a very early period of life, have wholly blunted and obliterated the little rubs of adverſe fortune.

I dare not venture to be inquiſitive, ſaid Roatſley, viſibly affected by the picture drawn by Mr. Howard, yet will you call me ſo when I acknowledge that both my curioſity and compaſſion are ſtrongly excited? Remember however in my juſtification, that Miſs Seymour herſelf permitted the enquiry, and if I miſtake not ſeemed aſtoniſhed it was yet to be made.

You ought not to wonder at a circumſtance ſo natural, ſaid Mr. Howard. Miſs Seymour's aſtoniſhment, great as it muſt have been, can ſcarce exceed mine to find that her *couſin*, the grandſon of Lord Belmont, remains ſtill uninformed of the natural ties that exiſt between them, eſpecially after the unſucceſsful application made to his Lordſhip through the medium and interference of Lady Linroſe for his countenance and favour.

At the expreſſion "her couſin, the grandſon of Lord Belmont," Roatſley caught ſuddenly the arm of Mr. Howard; and unable to interrupt him even by an ejaculation, remained rooted to the ſpot on which he ſtood in mute aſtoniſhment.

Good heavens! cried he, at length recovering himſelf—is it indeed poſſible that this amiable family, who ſo forcibly engaged my intereſt and attachment almoſt in the inſtant that accident preſented them to my ſight, ſhould really prove the children of my late unfortunate uncle, and connected with me by the ties of blood as they have ever been by thoſe of regard and admiration? Permit me, my dear Sir, continued he, approaching Mr. Howard with open arms, to congratulate myſelf on this delightful information, and pray give me leave to flatter myſelf with the hopes of one day procuring an intereſt in the affections of my dear and valuable relations almoſt equal to what they have long poſſeſſed in mine.

Mr. Howard was not a little affected by this generous warmth, as apparent in his countenance and manner as in his language, and expreſſed his feelings on the occaſion in ſtrong terms.

But

But why has this explanation been made no ſooner? cried Roatſley. Why have I continued ſo long in a painful and lingering uncertainty in regard to a family ſo reſpected and ſo beloved? diſtracted and confounded by the moſt unjuſt repreſentations, dark ſuggeſtions, and at beſt vague and comfortleſs conjectures.

Who may have found either intereſt or pleaſure in fabricating or in circulating injurious reports of your innocent and amiable couſins, ſaid Mr. Howard, is not poſſible for me to conceive, neither will I loſe a moment in attempting to confute what muſt appear ſo wholly unwarrantable and unjuſt, that I ſhall leave it entirely to time and intimacy to prove it ſo in the fulleſt extent.

Unneceſſary is the proof, cried Roatſley with warmth, for falſe and malicious I have ever believed thoſe reports to be. Yet you, my dear Sir, I am perſuaded will be neither aſtoniſhed nor offended, when I acknowledge that a multiplicity of diſagreeable rumours continually reaching my ears to the diſadvantage of thoſe, of whom from the ſurer evidence of my ſenſes I had the moſt amiable opinion, could not fail to ſhock and torment me; and if you can ſuppoſe a ſtate in which you could juſt ſo far credit an aſperſion as to allow it to teize and perplex you, without permitting it to influence your judgment, paradoxical as that ſtate may ſeem, it is exactly the ſituation under which my mind has for ſome time paſt laboured.

Far from being ſurpriſed, returned Mr. Howard with his uſual candour, I think I ſhould only have been ſo had you continued immovable and determined in your firſt prepoſſeſſions, when ſuch infinite trouble and attention have been be-

ſtowed to warp your judgment and miſlead your ſentiments.

But my mother, you ſay, was in the ſecret. Pray how came *ſhe* to be informed, while I and the reſt of the family remained wholly ignorant and unſuſpicious that my fair couſins had ever dreamt of quitting the ſecluded ſpot where they received their education?

That any individual of Lord Belmont's family ſhould continue uninformed of any ſtep taken by the ladies ſince their father's death, was by no means either their intention or mine. To their relations no ſecrecy was requiſite; and in regard to others, a temporary concealment was merely thought neceſſary, becauſe it offered an eaſy method for eſcaping the impertinence of curioſity and inveſtigation: and they naturally deferred relinquiſhing the name by which they had always hitherto been known, till the ſanction and countenance of Lord Belmont ſhould enable them to ſupport the cruel retroſpections which they knew their father's memory muſt ſuſtain on their introduction into the world. An utter and abſolute rejection from his Lordſhip to their application for acknowledgment, ſoon pointed out the fortunate propriety and delicacy of this precaution, as they afterwards diſdained all thoughts of aſſuming or proclaiming their title to a name, of which their family, however unjuſtly, deemed them unworthy.

You open a tranſaction ſo entirely new, wonderful, and inconceivable, cried Mr. Roatſley, who had been attending with an expreſſion of amazement in his countenance to this ſpeech of Mr. Howard's, that I can no otherwiſe hope to reduce it to my comprehenſion than by entreating

ing you to favour me with a minute and regular detail of every circumſtance.

Mr. Howard then beginning at the unhappy epocha, of my dear father's misfortunes, related briefly yet with preciſion every particular reſpecting him and his children till the period of our arrival in England.

In regard to many of theſe events, ſaid Mr. Howard, while he repeated to us this intereſting converſation, I could not ſuppoſe Mr. Roatſley compleatly ignorant. It may be naturally inferred that thoſe who could traduce the innocent offspring would not fail to load the parent's memory with additional reproach, and I doubt not but Mr. Roatſley's mind has been early tinctured with the moſt contumacious prejudices againſt his ill fated uncle. To know his errors, independent of the penitence and remorſe which ſo powerfully extenuated and even obliterated his guilt, could not but miſlead the nephew's candour, and muſt have induced him to regard with unabated horror a conduct that was followed by conſequences ſo unhappy as to baniſh him for ever from his friends and country.

I therefore dwelt with particular energy on the diſmal lapſe of years ſpent in ſorrowful ſecluſion that had ſucceeded to your father's rupture with his family, and continued invariably till his death: his contrition, his ſufferings, his rectitude and benevolence, and the aſſiduous care with which he inceſſantly laboured (and in which he ſo well ſucceeded) to inſtil into the minds of his children every virtuous and amiable ſentiment, as a barrier againſt the temptations and viciſſitudes of a world that from a too fatal experience he believed ſtrewed with dangers and replete with miſery; and in order to enforce

force this relation, I promiſed to procure him a peruſal of the manuſcript written by your father's own hand, which as he ſeeks not in it either to palliate or conceal his faults, but breathes in every line that horror which ever attended the ſenſe of his offences, offers a defence, the force of which candour muſt admit and juſtice itſelf acknowledge.

As Mr. Roatſley did not attempt to interrupt Mr. Howard, he proceeded to acquaint him with our arrival in town, our diſappointment in regard to Mr. Benſeley's deceaſe, our application in this uncomfortable and friendleſs ſituation to Lord Belmont through the medium of Lady Linroſe, and with every particular of the interview on that ſubject with her Ladyſhip.

He next recapitulated the ſubſtance of my letter to my grandfather, imploring his favour and protection; and in anſwer to this, ſaid he, taking out of his pocket book the epiſtle written him on that occaſion, pray take the trouble of reading his Lordſhip's final determination from the pen of Lady Linroſe.

During the latter part of this relation, Mr. Roatſley's countenance betrayed an agitation and aſtoniſhment that gave defiance, Mr. Howard ſaid, to all powers of expreſſion. His perplexity, after reading the letter, ſeemed but little abated. He was for ſome moments loſt in thought; but at length breaking ſilence—all that I can poſſibly conceive, cried he, all that it is in my power to conjecture or comprehend in this affair, is, that my mother having been herſelf deceived by the injurious aſperſions fabricated by the infamous woman Brumpton, which have been circulated in town with a credit that aſtoniſhes me, dreading the impetuoſity

of

of my temper, which might induce me to diſoblige Lord Belmont, and even to act in open defiance of a prohibition ſo unjuſt, ſo inhuman, ſo wholly contrary to his natural character and benevolence, in conſequence of her apprehenſion of creating that diſcordant diſſention which ever leads to alienation of affection and often to a total breach of family unanimity, has determined on concealing carefully from my knowledge every circumſtance of the application; yet I muſt acknowledge myſelf extremely diſpleaſed at a ſtep, which has been the means of retaining me ſo long in uneaſineſs and uncertainty, and the more I conſider the circumſtances of the whole tranſaction, the more I am aſtoniſhed and bewildered. To imagine that Lord Belmont, if properly apprized of the ſituation of his granddaughters, would allow an obſtinate and hardened prejudice to arreſt his juſtice, to influence his humanity, and even to baniſh natural affection from his boſom, is a ſuppoſition to which I cannot for an inſtant give credit; it is to believe him ſcarce human, and devoid of the firſt and moſt powerful principle of our moral conſtruction. My mother indeed labours under a cruel miſrepreſentation, to which ſhe has unfortunately given implicit faith, and which it has never been in my power to confute; for more than once have the Miſs Seymours, though their names and ſome vague reports concerning them were all I concluded ſhe knew, been the ſubject of diſcuſſion and even of altercation between us. Violently prepoſſeſſed againſt them previous to their application, her accounts may have perhaps influenced Lord Belmont's determination, even without her intending or dreading

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ing the injuſtice which her repreſentation of their characters may have occaſioned.

This indeed in ſome meaſure accounts for her Ladyſhip's conduct, and even greatly exculpates her from the charge of ſelfiſh and intereſted views. While ſhe regarded us in the light of relations who were likely to reflect diſhonour upon our family, and who could bring no conſolation to the deſolated boſom of our grandfather, it cannot be ſuppoſed that her mediation in our favour would prove fervent, nor that her anxiety for our ſucceſs could be as ſincere as if our conduct had ſupported our claims. Her cold reception of Mr. Howard, and her diſtant reſerve to myſelf, are here fully explained; and while the motives of her Ladyſhip's conduct are cleared up, a diſtant hope opens to view, that her prejudices being removed, thoſe of our only ſurviving parent may yet liſten to truth and yield to the voice of nature.

Is it not ſurprizing, however, that the infamous deſigns of this wretch Brumpton, in aſperſing our reputations, ſhould have ſo extenſively ſpread the ſlander as to reach the ears of a perſon who moves in a ſphere ſo ſuperior, ſo diſtinct from that wicked woman's line of life, and that theſe calumnies ſhould have flown with ſuch rapidity? for Lady Linroſe muſt have learnt that we were unworthy of her notice almoſt as ſoon as ſhe was informed that we ſolicited it. Mr. Howard's letter indeed, ſhe received before her departure from her country-ſeat, had afforded her an opportunity of being made acquainted with many particulars; but during the ſhort interval between her arrival in town and her conference with Mr. Howard, our buſy enemies muſt have contrived to ſow the ſeeds of

of that contagious diſtruſt and diſguſt, which then proceeded to infect and influence Lord Belmont.

This converſation having detained the two gentlemen till extremely late, they then ſeparated and went to reſt; though not before Roatſley had reminded Mr. Howard of his promiſe to intercede with my ſiſter and myſelf to procure him a peruſal of the manuſcript to which in his narration he had ſo often alluded.

So pleaſed, ſo affected was I with this relation, that it was with difficulty I could reſtrain my too viſible emotion; and I willingly gave into Mr. Howard's hands the diſmal packet, the mere ſight of which, as it lies in my bureau, often ſaddens my gayeſt moments.

Mr. Roatſley has been up ſome time, ſaid Mr. Howard; and anxious to preſent himſelf to you as a near and tender relation, has waited the hour of your riſing with all the impatience of a dear and long abſent friend.

Mr. Howard and my ſiſter then went to join him in the breakfaſting-parlour: but afraid to diſcover an agitation too poignant for the occaſion, intereſting as it was, I choſe to remain a few moments behind, in hopes of acquiring ſome degree of compoſure.

The inſtant my ſiſter appeared, Roatſley with open arms, and a countenance in the higheſt degree expreſſive of kindneſs and delight, approached her. Mr. Howard, cried he, are not couſins bleſt with peculiar privileges? and folding her in his arms, he embraced her with the tenderneſs and familiarity of a brother.

So our couſin does not deſert us, cried Fanny, receiving his ſalute with equal eaſe and pleaſure.

Good Heavens, my dear Mrs. Howard, I hope you do not confeſs ever having for a moment harboured a ſuſpicion at once ſo unnatural and injurious.

Juſt then I entered; and quitting my ſiſter's hand, he haſtened to ſeize mine, which he kiſſed very fervently more than once, though with a degree of embarraſſment, and even of diſtance, yes even of diſtance, Sophia, which did not in the leaſt influence his addreſs to Mrs. Howard.

A variety of ſenſations, a conflict of emotions, in defiance of all my ſummoned calmneſs and reſolution, wholly deprived me of utterance. Will you not acknowledge me, my deareſt couſin? cried he. At theſe words, you will bluſh for my weakneſs, Sophia—(I'm ſure I do moſt painfully at this moment, even at the recollection of my folly)—I burſt into tears, and haſtily pulling away my hand, turned from him in ſilence and ran out of the parlour.

A moment's reflection ſhewed me what an unaccountable appearance my behaviour muſt have had to all preſent. Without allowing myſelf therefore an inſtant for heſitation, leſt my ſpirit ſhould evaporate, I wiped my eyes and forced myſelf to return.

I bluſh for myſelf, ſaid I on re-entering the parlour; and my cheeks ſufficiently proved how true was the confeſſion; but as I have never before enjoyed the happineſs of knowing but one male relation, it is no wonder that the acknowledged preſence of another ſhould bring the firſt ſo forcibly to my memory as wholly to overcome my feelings.

In ſheltering my weakneſs under this little artifice, I was hardly guilty of deceit; for though my

my tears did not at that inſtant owe their ſource to this cauſe, the very idea had during the night drawn ſhowers from my eyes; and I could not help believing, that if our beloved father looked down upon his children, he muſt witneſs with pleaſure, even in his angelic ſtate, this reunion with his family.

Mr. Roatſley only replied by preſſing my hand tenderly in ſilence; and perceiving the ſubject as yet too affecting for my ſpirits, he forbore dwelling on it, and ſhifted the converſation to topics leſs intereſting. My heart was indeed ſo compleatly awakened to ſoftneſs and ſenſibility, that the keenneſs of my feelings gave even to my glad emotions the tincture of melancholy; and while the moſt heart-felt ſatisfaction lightened my countenance, a tear, which all my efforts could hardly diſperſe, was ready to follow every ſmile.

Of our breakfaſt converſation I can really give you no account. Indeed I believe it is conferring an unmerited compliment on what paſſed to dignify it with the name of converſation. A hundred different topics were occaſionally touched upon; but not one purſued with any method or connexion. Fanny's mirth was giddy and unbounded; Roatſley himſelf appeared in uncommon ſpirits; and though I perhaps was not the moſt talkative of the company, I believe my ſilent ſatisfaction was ſo apparent, that I was far from appearing the leaſt pleaſed.

Soon after breakfaſt he took leave of us in the kindeſt manner. I am unfortunately engaged, cried he in anſwer to the preſſing invitations of my ſiſter and Mr. Howard, otherwiſe undoubtedly I ſhould not have been proof againſt the friendly and obliging requeſt of my new-found relations,

relations, but while I remain in the country, which I think of doing for ſome time, I flatter myſelf you will allow me often to be your gueſt.

He then departed, followed by Mr. Howard; who having ſome buſineſs in the village, accompanied him on horſeback part of the way.

Fanny and I, left then to ourſelves, talked over every circumſtance of the tranſaction of laſt night. We made a thouſand reflections, you may believe, upon the ſingularity of our ſituation, and formed various conjectures upon the conduct of Lady Linroſe, and the unaccountable ſilence and ſecrecy ſhe has obſerved; which we could not avoid attributing in part to ſelfiſh motives.

My ſiſter dwelt with pleaſure on the tenderneſs of her couſin's behaviour on the firſt meeting. Had I never ſeen him till now, ſaid ſhe, the warmth of feeling with which he acknowledged a connexion ſo repugnant to the wiſhes of his family, muſt inſtantly have gained my heart. On approaching you, I obſerved he was more diſtant; and I confeſs the difference ſtruck me obviouſly. His addreſs to me was that of a kind and long abſent relation, who expreſſed in that character, with affection and familiarity, the pleaſure he felt at the rencontre; to you his behaviour ſeemed to betray more of the timidity of the lover, than the undiſguiſed kindneſs of the friend.

O certainly it reſembled the timidity of a lover extremely, cried I in an ironical tone, and I am afraid rather peeviſhly, for Fanny burſt into a loud laugh.

Nay, cried ſhe, I really think you have ſome reaſon to be jealous; for it muſt be confeſſed I

am

am grown a prodigious favourite ſince laſt night, and before, you know, he uſed to be ſo entirely engaged in another quarter, that he never could give himſelf the trouble to ſpeak nor to liſten to me, and ſeldom ſeemed even conſcious I was in the ſame room with him.

She was diverting herſelf at my expence, when Mr. Howard returned. Pray Fanny, cried he, what is it that amuſes you?

Nay I dare not tell for my ears, returned ſhe, for Hermione will beat me; but ſmiling expreſſively, ſhe ſung theſe two lines from the entertainment of Midas:

My ſiſter, he kiſs'd her, but me he paſs'd by,
I'm jealous of the fellow's bad taſte and blind eye.

She needed not have ſtopped there, for words could not have contrived to explain more clearly what ſhe pretended to conceal, and Mr. Howard's countenance expreſſed a momentary ſmile, but as if he was deſirous of relieving my embarraſſment, which was indeed extreme, he inſtantly entered on a new ſubject, tho' the rapidity with which he did ſo, by confirming my apprehenſions of ſuſpicion, gave me very ſevere mortification.

He ſoon after began to join warmly with my ſiſter in praiſe of our couſin's amiable qualities; and with an enthuſiaſm which delighted me, though I hardly ventured to appear attentive, recapitulated the converſation he had had with him during the ride. Though we have ſuffered ſo unaccountably from the breath of fame, ſaid he, it has at leaſt rendered us juſtice to this young man, whoſe character riſes upon me every opportunity I enjoy of converſing with him. I have juſt been receiving ſome farther lights in regard

regard to the ignorance in which he has continued thus long, and which appeared ſo extraordinary after the information given us in Mrs. Hindon's letter; but he has juſt now told me that ſince the converſation he had with my ſiſter-in-law that evening at her houſe, ſhe touched ſo lightly on particulars, ſuppoſing him already perfectly informed of the moſt material circumſtances, that not a hint eſcaped her which could have led him to diſcover his connexion with you. All I learnt from her was, ſaid he, that the two ladies had been unfortunate, were involved in conſequent difficulties, and that an application to Lord Belmont, (I concluded for his intereſt towards obtaining a penſion), had proved unſucceſsful. My anxiety could not fail to be ſtrongly excited: yet as the opportunity in a large company was unfavourable for entering more fully on the ſubject, I intended, for farther information, to apply next day to Mrs. Hindon, when I hoped to find her diſengaged and at liberty to ſatisfy me; and in the mean while I determined to enquire of my mother what ſhe knew of the affair, as I underſtood from ſome words dropped by Mrs. Hindon, that ſhe had intereſted herſelf in the application. I ſeized the earlieſt moment I could lay hold of to mention the matter to her, and next morning at breakfaſt aſked her if ſhe had ever been told that two young ladies of the name of Seymour, ladies whoſe names ſhe had often heard me repeat with every expreſſion of admiration, had beſought my grandfather's intereſt towards procuring them an annuity from government? My mother's anſwer I perfectly recollect. She told me ſhe believed ſuch a demand had been made by the ladies in queſtion, but that diſadvantageous

ous reports circulated againſt them, had arreſted his Lordſhip's intended exertions in their behalf, nor could he think of applying publicly in favour of girls, whoſe conduct by all accounts would reflect but diſcredit on thoſe who intereſted themſelves in their affairs.

It was in vain, continued Mr. Roatſley, that I combated theſe unjuſt imputations with all the arguments in my power, and appealed to your character, (as their guardian), ſo fully eſtabliſhed in the eyes of all favoured with your acquaintance. My mother coolly anſwered, that men even of the ſtricteſt probity were not likely to withdraw their protection on account even of the moſt flagrant improprieties of conduct in young girls committed to their charge, and that it was more than probable they had even impoſed on you with a borrowed appearance of that merit which art could eaſily aſſume, and beauty ſufficiently enforce. This, ſhe ſaid upon ſecond thoughts, ſeemed indiſputably the caſe, ſince a ſingle evening ſpent accidentally in their company had rendered me ſo warmly their friend, and had induced me ſo romantically to eſpouſe their cauſe, though totally uninformed of their characters and connexions. They were unknown in this country, even by my own account; (for I had mentioned that circumſtance as a motive of compaſſion), their fame was dubious at beſt: and ſuch miſconduct had been laid to their charge, that even this phraſe was a charitable one.

I warmly demanded from whom this ſlanderous intelligence had been received, and was at length unwillingly informed, that the woman with whom you lodged when in town, had acknowledged to my mother's maid, that the connexion

nexion between the ladies and their guardian was much too intimate for the diſtance required between a gentleman of character and his wards.

Shocked and confounded, though perfectly ſatisfied of the infamous falſhood of this ſcandalous aſperſion, I was determined to have the matter fully explained, and inſtantly went to the woman's houſe, where having entered into converſation with her, I enquired particularly about her late gueſts. Her anſwers were ambiguous and evaſive: and I ſoon perceived the character of the landlady was ſuch as muſt render all information from that quarter falſe and injurious. I therefore ſoon quitted her, firſt reprimanding her for the infamous aſperſions ſhe had expreſſed, and aſſuring her that the ladies poſſeſſed friends who would loudly confute and rigorouſly puniſh thoſe who might utter them. I returned home furniſhed as I imagined with proofs and arguments more than ſufficient to overthrow the moſt determined prejudices. But my mother would hardly allow me to enter on the ſubject; and telling me neither herſelf nor I had any intereſt in the behaviour of two girls who were unknown to her even by ſight, and ſhe was afraid fully as unknown to me by character, although the acquaintance of a few hours had enabled me to judge ſo perfectly of their diſpoſitions, poſitively declared ſhe ſhould on no account be prevailed with to intercede with Lord Belmont in their behalf. I now perceive her motive, concluded Mr. Roatſley, for retaining me in ignorance. Prejudiced herſelf againſt my couſins before ſhe was informed of their real name and ſituation, ſhe was unwilling to ſtrengthen a prepoſſeſſion which might lead me to act contrary to the commands of Lord Belmont, whoſe will in matters

matters of the moſt trifling moment has ever been regarded as a law in our family, and who it ſeems has poſitively forbidden the protection or countenance of my mother to be extended to theſe amiable relations. Indeed ſhe might well dread the impetuoſity of my temper on ſuch an occaſion would but ill brook the conſtraint of a prohibition ſo unnatural, and well might ſhe know that no Lord Belmont on earth would have prevailed with me to join in a meaſure, which reaſon and humanity muſt condemn, and the moſt inflexible prejudice only could adopt.

I ſhall not comment on this converſation, Sophia. It ſpeaks for itſelf. Adieu, my love. My packet is immenſe, but I reſt aſſured you do not complain of its length. I direct it to Avignon, as you deſired me in your laſt; from which place I expect ſoon to receive a long volume of your journal.

H. SEYMOUR.

LETTER XX.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

JUNE 17.

YESTERDAY I walked out as uſual in the morning, intending to ſtroll through the wood, attended by one of the Parſon's little girls, of whom my ſiſter is extremely fond, and who often finds her way up the hill and ſpends the day with us. She is a delightful child of five

years

years old, with a countenance animated and blooming as the ſpring; her flaxen hair curls round her face in ringlets ſo pictureſque, that I imagined ſhe would be an admirable ſubject for my pencil, and have accordingly drawn her in crayons, careſſing a favourite little dog who always accompanies her in her viſits. The portrait has ſurpaſſed my hopes; for I have ſucceeded tolerably well, both in the reſemblance and attitude, and it makes a very ornamental piece of furniture for the drawing-room. Since that period, the child had been continually teizing me to draw a little picture as a preſent for her doll; and as children, when they have got a whim in their heads, are unceaſing in their importunities, ſhe perſecuted me during our walk to ſit down to work on a ſheet of paper which ſhe had brought in her hand from the houſe for that purpoſe.

The ſcene here is romantic beyond imagination. The river, that murmurs below at the foot of a gentle deſcent, is ſhaded by the moſt venerable oaks, which ſometimes form a thicket wild and ſequeſtered, and in other places admit views of a moſt fertile and beautiful country: which being embelliſhed with the plantations ſurrounding the ſplendid ſeats of ſeveral gentlemen of the county at a diſtance, and ornamented with a nearer ſight of the ſpire belonging to the pariſh church, exhibits a proſpect of gaiety as well as grandeur. A walk that is cut in the ſlope of a bank, is my favourite reſort, and ſo well calculated for ſoothing into a languor not unpleaſant, any oppreſſion which reſts upon the mind, that I found it peculiarly ſuited to the preſent ſtate of my ſpirits; and to rid myſelf of Charlotte's importunities, I at length ſat down

on

on one of the green ſeats, and pulling out a pencil, began to trace a little rough ſketch which ſoon ſatisfied the child, who employed herſelf in running about gathering noſegays from the wood flowers that adorned the banks of the river.

Having the pencil in my hand, I began almoſt unconſciouſly to delineate upon the cover of a letter, features ſo deeply engraven on my mind, that I required not the preſence of the original to enable me to recollect every trait of expreſſion with accuracy; and a few ſtrokes, tho' incorrect and unfiniſhed, ſoon exhibited a reſemblance, to which, innumerable as have been my ſecret attempts on the ſame ſubject, I had never before attained.

Charmed with my ſucceſs, I gazed with delight on the drawing which promiſed to be the private companion of many a ſolitary hour; and ſo wholly abſorbed was I in contemplating my performance, that I heard not the ſound of ſteps that approached me, till a voice almoſt at my ear ſaid—"I hope I don't diſturb your meditations, Miſs Seymour:" and ſuddenly looking up, I beheld Roatſley immediately behind me.

Conſcious apprehenſion made me inſtantly ſtart up in confuſion; and the paper dropping from my hand, a light breeze which juſt then ſeemed to riſe for the purpoſe of plunging me into difficulties, got hold of it, and quickly conveyed it down the ſlope of the bank below.

Uncertain whether he had a glimpſe of it or not, and unable to recover myſelf ſufficiently to affect unconcern, I uttered not a word, but followed the flying cover with my eyes, in which anxiety and embarraſſment were ſo ſtrongly painted, that Roatſley inſtantly added—what a world

world of miſchief have I been guilty of! and directly flew to recover it.

For Heaven's ſake, exclaimed I in abſolute agonies, for Heaven's ſake don't think about it. It is not of the ſlighteſt importance; it is a trifle, a drawing not worth the trouble of picking up; and catching hold of his arm, (for I knew not what I was doing), juſt as he had arrived at the ſpot where a buſh obſtructed its progreſs—For God's ſake come away, repeated I with a vehemence the moſt ill judged and abſurd, and ſo far beyond what the occaſion could poſſibly require without the intereſt of ſome ſecret cauſe, that no wonder he ſtood with his eyes fixed upon me in mute aſtoniſhment. The look of perplexity and ſurpriſe with which he regarded me, inſtantly diſcovered to me my fooliſh imprudence in giving way to an alarm that had in fact no real foundation, and from which a ſmall degree of ſelf command and preſence of mind might have relieved me. I then heartily repented my folly; but alas! it was too late, and I only diſcovered my unfortunate abſurdity time enough to lament its effects.

We were both ſilent for a few moments. At length—I cannot think any thing a trifle, ſaid he, with a fluſh on his countenance, that gives Miſs Seymour ſuch viſible uneaſineſs; eſpecially—a drawing too—added he heſitating. The ſubject of her ſolitary contemplation. Allow me at leaſt, Madam, to reſtore to you what appears of ſuch infinite value; and darting forward, he caught the paper in his hand.

Sir, cried I, with a ſpirit which the preſent exigency alone could have inſpired, and with all the firmneſs my terror gave me courage to aſſume, only hear me; if you caſt one look on

that

that paper, never will I pardon, never will I ſee you more.

This ſpeech certainly was frantic in the higheſt degree. It was acknowledging the truth of his hint; it was allowing him to conclude that the drawing was the reſemblance of ſome perſon dear to my heart, ſince my agitation appeared ſo unaccountable; but my imprudent uneaſineſs from the beginning muſt I imagined have infuſed theſe ſuſpicions by this time ſtrongly into his mind; and ſhocked to the ſoul at the apprehenſion of my heart being thus laid open in a manner ſo mortifying, ſo dreadful, to the man on earth from whom I moſt wiſhed its weakneſs concealed, this ſudden prohibition ſtruck me as the only poſſible means of preventing immediate detection.

He ſtill held the paper in his hand, and would not be prevailed with to reſtore it; but he made no attempt to examine it. I dare not riſk your diſpleaſure, cried he, with a countenance expreſſive of uneaſineſs and ſuſpenſe. To be baniſhed from your ſight, and the object of your hate, are ideas too horrible, too inſupportable to be thought of; yet are they almoſt the only puniſhments that could at this inſtant ſo forcibly operate on my mind as to arreſt my impatience and deter me from ſatisfying my burning curioſity.

Give me the paper, cried I; it belongs to me—it is mine——

And is dear to you, interrupted he with a voice almoſt ſuffocated, and holding it above my reach; ſay that it is dear to you, and I will indeed fly your ſight for ever.

No,

No, cried I, 'tis nobody—'tis nothing—it is not of the leaſt conſequence—only give it me, or I never will forgive you.

Little Charlotte perceiving this altercation, juſt then came running up to us. Is it the pretty gentleman's picture, cried ſhe, for I had been imprudent enough to allow her to look over me while I was roughly ſketching it.

A gentleman's picture, repeated Roatſley. Yes that it muſt be, and the ſemblance of the moſt bleſt, the moſt envied of mankind.

No, cried I, with an imprudence which I ſhall deplore to my lateſt hour, but of which my exhauſted ſpirits made me unconſciouſly guilty, I almoſt hate him at this inſtant, and (oh! Sophia, you will bluſh the deepeſt crimſon for me) I burſt into tears.

Theſe words, and the manner, the warmth with which they were pronounced, alas! too plainly diſcovered the fatal ſecret. Scarce had they eſcaped my lips, when their too obvious meaning was apparent to myſelf. My feelings were then unutterable, but conſcious that my folly could not be recalled, I ſaw no conſolation but in flight, and turning away with all the expedition in my power, I was flying down the bank towards the Chineſe bridge, when Roatſley, too violently agitated to perceive the preſence of the child, ſuddenly ſeizing my hand, prevented me by throwing himſelf at my feet. Miſs Seymour, cried he, with an energy which muſt have ſurmounted all oppoſition had reſiſtance been in my power—lovely and adored Miſs Seymour, ſtay but for an inſtant. That ſecret paſſion which has proved the torment of my life ſo long, how ſhall I ſtifle or conceal in a moment like this? how ſhall I ſuppreſs the perhaps

haps too fatal preſumption to which it gives birth! For the ſake of heaven, allow me either to put an interpretation on your preſent agitation, which will overwhelm me with a tranſport almoſt too infinite to be ſupported, or at once, by withdrawing your prohibition, daſh my deluſive hopes and puniſh my aſpiring folly as it deſerves.

Oh! Sophia, what were my ſenſations at this ſpeech! I tried in vain to diſengage my hand; and having at length effected it, I covered my face with both, and almoſt ſunk upon the ground. Roatſley, alarmed at my ſituation, haſtily aroſe, and obliging me to lean on his arm, ſupported me almoſt fainting to a bench that encircled the trunk of an ancient ſycamore not far diſtant.

Weakneſs for a few moments ſuſpended ſhame, but ſoon my ſtrength returning, my confuſion redoubled with a violence unſpeakable. During this ſhort interval we were both ſilent, and Roatſley alternately kiſſed the hand he held in his and the drawing which he had now ventured to examine, and which he regarded as the aſſured pledge of my affection. Oh! my Sophia, feel for your friend at this moment of emotion. Conceive if you can my ſenſations. But indeed that is wholly impoſſible. I was overwhelmed with ſhame, covered with bluſhes, and my pride moſt painfully wounded: the ſeverity of the mortification I endured made me wiſh that I could ſink into the ground and for ever conceal myſelf from the eyes of Roatſley, who gazed on me with a delight chaſtened by a degree of diffidence that ſeemed to aim at reconciling me to myſelf.

Pardon

Pardon me, lovelieſt of women, cried he, the moment he ſaw me beginning to recover, which I no ſooner did than I attempted to riſe—pardon the man who adores you—who would ſacrifice his life, his happineſs, for your's.

Juſt as he pronounced theſe words with the moſt paſſionate warmth, little Charlotte, who had been preſent during the whole of this diſtreſſing ſcene, a circumſtance which our mutual agitation had prevented our diſcovering, came running forward, and ſurpriſing him upon his knees, ſtared at the ſingularity of his attitude with a look of curioſity and ſurpriſe that quickly reſtored both his recollection and mine.

Roatſley ſtarted from the poſture from which I had before repeatedly entreated him to riſe without effect, and inſtantly getting up to leave him, I declared that on no account I could remain longer; and unable to meet his eyes, quickened my ſteps towards the houſe.

Stay but for a few moments, ſaid he in a low voice, but in the moſt earneſt manner; leave me not in this agonizing ſuſpenſe I beſeech you.

My confuſion and perplexity having ſomewhat ſubſided, my heart began to taſte the felicity of knowing (diſtreſſing as had been the circumſtances to which I owed the diſcovery) that what I felt I had not been incapable of inſpiring; but at this moment the recollection of Lady Elizabeth and his engagements ruſhing upon my mind, ſhame, reſentment, and anguiſh, all at once aſſailed me; and recalling with bitter regret the weakneſs I had betrayed and the profeſſions which compaſſion perhaps alone had extorted, I pulled away the hand that Roatſley had again ſeized, and haſtily ſaid—you have egregiouſly deceived yourſelf, Sir, and I own I am

am juſtly to blame in having partly given cauſe for the deception; but I deſire you will leave me, and allow me to return inſtantly home. I ſhall be ſeriouſly diſpleaſed if you perſiſt in detaining me; and having ſlightly curtſeyed to him, though without venturing to regard him, I redoubled my pace and arrived at the houſe, not having once looked back.

On entering the hall, my ſiſter ran to me. Hermione, cried ſhe, what have you done with yourſelf all the morning? I have been ſending to the hut and all over the wood to find you: for pray who do you think is about to honour us with a viſit, but our condeſcending Right Honourable relation, Lady Linroſe.

Lady Linroſe! repeated I in amazement.

Yes, her ſervant has been here with a card informing us that her Ladyſhip is on the road to wait on us, and entreats the favour of being allowed to ſee us one half hour in private.

Juſt as ſhe ſpoke a carriage and four drove up to the door; and ſcarce had we gained the parlour, when Lady Linroſe herſelf entered it.

She approached us with a look of the moſt engaging and affectionate familiarity. I may well dread the reception I ought to meet with, ſaid ſhe, taking a hand of each; but if the countenance is to be truſted, I will venture to hope that a behaviour which I have been unwillingly conſtrained hitherto to ſupport will not, when its motives are candidly examined, utterly exclude me from the proſpect of obtaining your friendſhip.

Confounded by an addreſs ſo unexpected, we bowed in ſilence; and my ſiſter leading to the ſopha we all ſeated ourſelves.

I am now venturing on a ſtep, reſumed her Ladyſhip, which I have long ardently wiſhed it in my power to purſue, but which even at this moment is ſo dangerous and daring, that the exigency of the preſent occaſion, and a due regard to my own character only, can excuſe or palliate my imprudence. I have long moſt anxiouſly deſired the opportunity of a moment like this, in which I could fairly and candidly lay before you the motives of a conduct which muſt doubtleſs have appeared to you harſh, cruel, and unfeeling. Alas! you knew not, that while duty withheld from you the protection to which you ſo juſtly laid claim, ſlander and injuſtice united to render the prohibition on my part eaſy to fulfil. Lately, but very lately, was I made acquainted with the value of what, by the commands of a parent, I am deprived of enjoying—your friendſhip and ſociety. No ſooner however was the veil taken from my eyes, than my mind became uneaſy till it had acknowledged its injurious prejudices; and ſome alarming circumſtances, to which I muſt entreat one quarter of an hour's attention, have at length determined me to hazard the danger of Lord Belmont's diſpleaſure, ſhould this act of diſobedience reach his ears, rather than continue to appear in a light ſo injurious to my heart, ſo contrary to my real feelings.

Having received a bow of acknowledgment from my ſiſter, and an aſſurance from me that the preſent apology entirely obliterated all recollection of what once perhaps we might have conſidered as unkind, her Ladyſhip proceeded.

I muſt in the firſt place ſincerely acknowledge, continued ſhe, that I have no adequate apology to offer for having given credit to aſperſions

which

which I have ſince found ſo perfectly ill founded and unjuſt; but perhaps you may be kind enough to admit ſome ſort of palliation from the utter ignorance in which I had been retained reſpecting you. That I had ſuch relations, was merely all I knew; and no ſooner had I received Mr. Howard's letter, than I determined in my own mind to afford you all the civility, kindneſs, and attention, to which your youth, ſex, and ſituation in a quarter of the world entirely new, juſtly entitled you, eſpecially as it was not difficult for me to perceive you were the ſame agreeable party which my ſon had encountered on his journey, with whom he had been ſo much charmed and in whoſe favour he had ſo much prepoſſeſſed me. Had he been with me at the moment of my receiving the letter, I ſhould undoubtedly have inſtantly yielded to the warmth of my compaſſion, and entruſted him, however imprudently, with the ſecret of your birth and connexion; but indiſpenſable buſineſs had hurried him from me almoſt immediately upon his arrival, and time being given me for conſideration, I foreſaw how precarious and perplexing was the part I had now to act. Lord Belmont's character was well known to me. Though rigid in principle and fervent in benevolence, his prejudices are rooted and immovable; and a prepoſſeſſion once fixed in his mind, allows neither reaſon nor humanity to interfere towards its extirpation. What ſteps he might purſue were doubtful; and my fears greatly overbalanced my hopes as to the generoſity of his conduct. Theſe reflections, though combated by my ſecret wiſhes, determined me to ſtand aloof till his Lordſhip's reſolution was known; and if poſſible, by guarding the ſecret

careful y from my family and more eſpecially from my ſon, whoſe warmth of feelings and impetuoſity I particularly dreaded, to preſerve them from the wrathful effects of a diſpleaſure from which I myſelf have ſuffered too ſeverely not to apprehend it with terror.

I intended to haſten to town; but ſome previous buſineſs of real moment deferred my journey for ſome little time, and an alarming complaint, but of ſhort duration, confined me ſo cloſely for a few days after my arrival, that I had no opportunity for tranſacting the buſineſs that had occaſioned my removal, and which, from the neceſſity of preſerving it a profound ſecret, I was unable to manage by an agent. During this interval, anxious to get information through every poſſible means, of the ſituation of my young relations, in regard to whom I felt myſelf extremely ſolicitous, it may be eaſily conjectured that I attempted every channel of intelligence, and made enquiry of every perſon whom friendſhip or intimacy allowed to viſit me during my confinement. I was conſtrained to mention you however merely as agreeable, accidental acquaintances, whom my ſon had repreſented to me in an engaging and favourable point of view, and your very names were unknown to all to whom I applied, my ſon's friend Mr. Bradſhaw excepted; who informed me that he had the honour of reſiding under the ſame roof with you, but whoſe light and diſreſpectful manner of expreſſing himſelf ſhocked and confounded me. The particulars which I contrived to draw from him, though vague and void of proof, I muſt acknowledge infuſed a portion of doubt and diſtruſt into my mind; but when I take the liberty

of

of repeating what he ſaid, I hope you will in ſome meaſure excuſe and forgive me.

Your perſonal charms alone, he told me, were known to him; for to your private character he was a ſtranger, though if appearances were to be truſted, the latter by no means conferred any additional luſtre on the former: he ſome time afterwards added, that he had been informed at all hands you were light, doubtful, and indiſcreet; your principal, if not your almoſt only aſſociate, being a woman of infamous character, at whoſe windows he himſelf had frequently beheld you. Though I was thunderſtruck at this intelligence, I did not give it implicit credit, but contrived to diſpatch my own maid, who has been long and deſervedly in my confidence, with orders to make private enquiries reſpecting your conduct of the people with whom you lodged. Their accounts, ambiguous and perplexing, ſerved only to ſtrengthen and confirm my error.

Here I could not reſiſt making an attempt to interrupt Lady Linroſe, with the deſign of explaining the various and ſingular cauſes of theſe imputations: but perceiving my intention—hold, my dear Madam, ſaid ſhe warmly. Do me not the injuſtice to imagine I now require any particulars to convince me of your innocence, and of my own inconſiderate concluſions. 'Tis *my* vindication, not your's, that brought me hither; and if any doubt could have remained on my mind, after having been once in your company, my ſon's explanation muſt have wholly removed it. I have already engaged your attention too long: yet I muſt requeſt the indulgence of a few moments longer.

Such

Such was the ſituation of affairs, when I beſought the favour of a viſit from Mr. Howard; and in ſpite of the ill opinion I had imbibed of his wards, I wrote to Lord Belmont in their behalf with all the warmth they could have deſired; though to own the truth, the longer I reflected, the more was I convinced that the ſucceſs of the application would be ſuch as it proved. The event juſtified my prudence in having concealed the matter from my ſon; his Lordſhip, amongſt other injunctions, having ſtrongly enjoined a continuation of ſecreſy. There is a certain portion of ſpirit in my grandſon's character, ſaid he in his letter, which leads me to dread his conduct on this occaſion. While I admire and approve of a diſpoſition that is the ſource in general of noble and generous actions, in the preſent inſtance I fear the effects of its enthuſiaſm, which may induce him to regard thoſe unfortunate relations as objects of peculiar intereſt and regard. I ſolemnly declare however, that his interference in this point with my commands, ſhall for ever exclude him my favour, and caſt him from my heart for ever.

Some time afterwards, my ſon one day unexpectedly demanded if I had ever been made acquainted with an application to Lord Belmont from thoſe ladies of the name of Seymour, againſt whom I ſeemed to have taken a prepoſſeſſeſſion ſo unaccountable? I evaded the queſtion; and, though not without difficulty, ſoon after waved the ſubject: for while his expreſſions ſhewed me that he knew but half the ſecret, his warmth convinced me his knowledge of the whole would prove deſtructive of that unanimity

mity and affection which has ever ſince ſubſiſted between him and his grandfather.

Such being my private ſentiments of you, and ſuch my ſituation with my ſon, you may eaſily conceive what my aſtoniſhment muſt have been on finding myſelf unexpectedly introduced to you at Holtenham Abbey. Your countenance, your manner, and the ingenuous innocence which ſhone conſpicuous in both, opened my eyes, and unavoidably engaged my regard and admiration. Yet withheld from acknowledging myſelf to you in the manner I wiſhed, I was unwillingly conſtrained to aſſume the diſtance of a ſtranger; and I will candidly own, that as ſuch I muſt have ſtill continued, had not the preſent unhappy diſſention between my favourite ſon and myſelf obliged me to lay before you the private motives of my conduct—motives which I own only can excuſe it.

Her Ladyſhip was viſibly affected at theſe words; but having wiped her eyes, continued—Mr. Roatſley, I find, has been informed, I ſuppoſe by this family, of the whole affair; and diſpleaſed with the part which prudence perſuaded me to perform, laſt night deſired from me an explanation of every particular. Finding all further ſecreſy impracticable, I readily and candidly acknowledged the truth; but this, inſtead of ſatisfying and convincing him, ſerved merely to heighten the reſentment that barely preſerved the reſpect which duty and affection has never yet allowed him to forget towards his mother. Shocked to the ſoul by this difference, the firſt that from the moment of his birth ever occurred between us, I determined to open my heart to *you*; from the flattering hope, that knowing the ſecret ſpring of every part of my conduct,

conduct, *you* might be enabled to do juſtice to my motives; and I truſt ſhould the ſubject ever again recur when my ſon viſits you, you will have the goodneſs and generoſity to convince him that in ſuch circumſtances, where the inflexible diſpleaſure of Lord Belmont was at ſtake, it was the indiſpenſable duty of a parent to act as I did.

My ſiſter and I in warm terms returned her Ladyſhip thanks for this candid and ingenuous explanation, which we ſincerely aſſured her entirely ſatisfied us as to every point of her behaviour. As matters ſtood, Sophia, it was undoubtedly both prudent and natural for Lady Linroſe to conduct herſelf in the manner ſhe has done, and I now reflect with pain on the injurious opinion that chagrin and diſappointment induced us to entertain of a character which this one converſation developes in the moſt amiable and honourable point of view.

We expreſſed much uneaſineſs at the difference which Mr. Roatſley's compaſſionate humanity, in eſpouſing ſo warmly our cauſe, had occaſioned with a parent to whoſe foreſight and maternal attentions he owed ſo much, and hoped it had proceeded to no diſagreeable lengths.

My ſon, ſaid her Ladyſhip, is poſſeſſed of the moſt amiable diſpoſition in the world. The converſation I have juſt now mentioned, paſſed between us laſt night, when he aſked permiſſion to attend me in my dreſſing-room after ſupper. I had obſerved that he was grave and uneaſy the whole day; but no opportunity for an explanation had till then occurred. Though gentle to exceſs, his paſſions, when once rouſed, are by no means eaſily controuled. The circumſtances of your ſituation had naturally excited his compaſſion,

paſſion, and his knowledge of your amiable characters deprived me of the only excuſe he would admit as a palliation of my conduct. Lord Belmont's prohibition, he ſaid, he could regard as none where honour and humanity were concerned. There was neither ſpirit nor principle in a ſlaviſh dependance on the will and opinions of others. In ſuch a moment, prudence was ſelfiſhneſs, and obedience ſo implicit could only be deemed abject and ſervile.

He left me with theſe words: but ſoon after recollecting himſelf, he returned, not however with the intention of openly *apologizing* for his heat, but apparently from the wiſh of in ſome meaſure *atoning* for it by talking over the matter with calmneſs and temper.

This he did: and we parted at a late hour on good terms. What had paſſed however hung heavy on my ſpirits. I foreſaw a world of tumult and oppoſition from this unfortunate diſcovery, and I determined to eaſe my mind of part of its burthen, by openly diſcloſing my diſquiets to the innocent cauſe of them, and entreating their forgiveneſs for the mental injury I have done them.

My ſon avows his reſolution of applying to Lord Belmont in your favour, a determination, which far from diſſuading him from performing, I highly approve of, and ſhall myſelf enforce with that additional energy which admiration and regard muſt now produce; I cannot avoid however expreſſing my apprehenſions that Roatſley's interference will irritate rather than perſuade; and while to you he performs no eſſential ſervice, he is diſappointing and diſobliging his grandfather at the moſt critical moment perhaps of his life; for I will not conceal any thing from you:

I make no doubt indeed you muſt already have been informed of it: my ſon is ſoon to be happily ſettled in life with a moſt amiable and valuable young lady; *a tender affection ſubſiſts between them*; the match is in every reſpect deſirable; but LordBelmont's decided approbation can alone ſecure that of his young bride's family and connexions.

My heart, Sophia—oh! what did not my heart endure at theſe words? It died within me. I caſt my eyes on the ground, and avoided with the utmoſt care the penetrating look with which Lady Linroſe regarded me. The agitating ſcene that had ſo recently paſſed between her ſon and myſelf flaſhed with redoubled anguiſh on my thoughts; the recollection was miſery, and I felt as a culprit in his mother's preſence. From this ſtate of embarraſſment and diſtreſs, I was preſently in part relieved by the entrance of my little teizing companion Charlotte, who had been playing on the green before the houſe, and juſt at this moment appeared. Her Ladyſhip, not thinking it prudent to proceed on a ſubject of ſuch moment before the child, having now explained herſelf ſufficiently, ſhifted the converſation to leſs intereſting topicks; and being charmed with the little girl's beauty, began to chat with her.

Amongſt other queſtions ſuited to her age, Lady Linroſe, to ſet her a prattling, made the enquiry with which all children have been ſo often importuned, viz. which did ſhe love beſt, Mrs. Howard or Miſs Seymour? and Charlotte, not in the leaſt at a loſs for a reply, which delicacy even in infancy ſometimes renders embarraſſing, inſtantly replied—oh, Miſs Seymour certainly. Every body loves Miſs Seymour, and

and the gentleman loves her too, for I know that well enough.

We ſhall get all your ſecrets, Miſs Seymour, cried Lady Linroſe, ſmiling at my unſpeakable confuſion. But pray, my dear, turning to the child, who is this admirer of Miſs Seymour's?

What does the child mean, cried I, with a look which I intended for ſurpriſe, but which I am afraid partook infinitely more of alarm: pray don't be fooliſh, Charlotte. But alas! I tried in vain to interrupt her; for delighted with being allowed to prate, and charmed with the importance of evidently diſtreſſing me, ſhe anſwered Lady Linroſe archly in a loud whiſper—oh it muſt be her lover you know; for he kiſſed her hand juſt now again and again in the Filbert walk.

Conceive, if poſſible, my conſcious diſtreſs. Words can but faintly expreſs my ſituation. I dreaded that every feature of my face would diſcover who this ſecret admirer was, and all ſpirit to rally it off forſook me. I thought at that moment this was certainly the moſt painful exceſs to which ſhame and apprehenſion could arrive; but I was too ſoon taught how deplorable erroneous was this idea.

A ſhort and moſt diſtreſſing pauſe ſucceeded to Charlotte's ſally of gaiety. Lady Linroſe, perceiving I ſuppoſe my uneaſineſs, politely forebore encreaſing it by proceeding in her enquiries, and looking at her watch, roſe to depart.

My ſiſter aſked the favour of her Ladyſhip's company to partake of a family dinner, if ſhe was not otherwiſe engaged. I ſincerely regret, ſaid ſhe, that I promiſed my friend Lady Mary

to

to be home by four o'clock: for as my viſits, my dear Mrs. Howard, muſt be few and privately ſtolen, I lament that I cannot indulge myſelf with a longer one at preſent: but we know not how things may turn out, added ſhe with great kindneſs—we may perhaps be more fortunate than we at preſent imagine.

Mr. Howard will regret not having ſhared in the honour of this viſit, Madam, ſaid my ſiſter: and juſt as ſhe ſpoke, her huſband, who had been told who was with us, entered the parlour.

Lady Linroſe received him with particular civility; and though on her way to the carriage, which had been ordered to the door, unfortunately turned back and ſat down again for a few minutes.

After the uſual compliments and enquiries—I flattered myſelf Mr. Roatſley had accompanied your Ladyſhip, ſaid Mr. Howard, as I ſaw him at a diſtance little more than an hour ago with my ſiſter in the walk; but it was not then in my power to join them, as I was employed procuring aſſiſtance to my old gardener, who has met with a very diſagreeable accident this morning.

You muſt have miſtaken ſome other perſon for Mr. Roatſley, ſaid Mrs. Howard, for he has not favoured us with his company to-day.

Was he not here, ſiſter, cried Mr. Howard, turning to me with a ſurpriſe, which I fear my too apparent diſtreſs ſufficiently abated; for as if conſcious of having committed ſome miſtake, he left the ſentence unfiniſhed.

This was too dreadful. I believe Mr. Roatſley was walking to-day, ſaid I at length: but the anguiſh of my feelings made my voice faulter even during this ſhort ſentence; and Lady Linroſe

Linroſe roſe before I had concluded it, curtſeyed in ſilence to me, and taking her leave, was attended to the hall by Mr. Howard and my ſiſter.

Being left alone—oh God! cried I to myſelf, what a day of miſery has this been? My imprudence can only be equalled by my ſhame and deſpair. I was in agonies. I now perceived that Roatſley was inevitably devoted to another. The declaration, my Sophia, which burſt from his lips, his reaſon, his principles, even his heart, muſt condemn in the firſt moments of cool reflection. The remembrance muſt wound him, and is an inſult to me. He knows my weakneſs. It is no longer concealed as hitherto in the ſecret receſſes of my heart. All the world knows it. Even his mother is no longer ignorant of the fatal ſecret; and what may ſhe not conclude from the circumſtances which have revealed it to her knowledge? Would to Heaven I could hide my confuſion and folly for ever from the whole earth. But even if I could, how ſhall I ever conceal from myſelf the bitter, heart-rending recollection of my own imprudence?

I was almoſt frantic: and the moment I perceived the carriage drive off, I flew into my own room and ſhut myſelf up. Fanny ſoon followed, demanding admittance. But I could not for ſome time prevail with myſelf to grant it; for although my heart is ſtrongly and tenderly attached to her, a diſſimilarity of diſpoſition, and the circumſtance of her being a married woman, which makes me apprehenſive that her huſband will be a ſharer of all ſhe knows, renders my confidence in her neither ſo comfortable nor ſo undiſguiſed as it would otherwiſe prove. I am not

not ſo unjuſt as to ſuppoſe ſhe could ever be prevailed with to betray by the ſlighteſt hint the ſecrets repoſed in her; but the openneſs of her diſpoſition renders me very ſuſpicious that ſhe might be imprudent without being conſcious of her error; and though I am thoroughly ſatisfied that ſhe is as happy with Mr. Howard as it is poſſible for any woman to be in the married ſtate, yet I feel a degree of indelicacy in painting anxieties and ardours which were ſo wholly excluded her own courtſhip, and which may for that reaſon appear romantic and unaccountable.

I partly confeſſed however the diſagreeable ſituation in which I found myſelf involved; and without touching on the circumſtances of the drawing, and the declaration it had produced, which indeed I cannot recal to mind, and could not have mentioned without anguiſh unſpeakable, I owned I had met with Roatſley that morning, and acknowledged the uneaſineſs which the little girl's raillery before his mother had occaſioned me.

I know not what to make of him, ſaid Fanny: and undoubtedly this couſin of ours after all is a little unaccountable; for as Miſs Farnford obſerved, his miſtreſs has ſurely ſome reaſon to complain of his attentions in another quarter; and what can the man mean if he is actually on the eve of wedlock? I don't underſtand his behaviour.

Alas! thought I, I underſtand his behaviour but too well. It is my too apparent weakneſs and folly which have for a time produced in his heart a temporary inconſtancy. Oh, Sophia! how painful is this idea! All my pride of heart

riſes

riſes againſt it. I am ſunk in my own opinion —I am humbled and miſerable.

There is but one ſtep to be taken, ſaid I to my ſiſter. To ſee Lady Linroſe again would be at preſent peculiarly diſagreeable; and tho' ſhe gave at parting no intimation of a ſpeedy return, ſhe may very poſſibly contrive to ſee us before ſhe leaves the country, which I own I would wiſh to avoid, and a very ſimple and natural method of doing ſo has occurred to me: I think of haſtening my viſit to our dear and valuable Lady Aubrey. It is but ſetting off in a day or two inſtead of three weeks hence. I am ſure of finding her at home, and ſhall this very day write to prepare her to expect me.

My ſiſter, who has never been ſeparated from me for many years, and who diſlikes the idea of my leaving her even for a ſhort time, made ſome little objections to this plan, alledging that Lady Linroſe had requeſted her viſit might be kept a ſecret, from which it was naturally to be inferred that it was not likely to be ſoon repeated.

I did not chuſe to own explicitly that it was the ſon ſtill more than the mother that I wiſhed to avoid, though I told her that I thought I ought not to expoſe myſelf to attentions that were, (tho' I believed unintentionally), certainly an inſult to my character: and I ſoon perſuaded her to acknowledge, if ſuch were my ſentiments, that I ought not to defer my journey.

The difficulty that now remained, was how to conceal my real motive from Mr. Howard: but happily a fortunate pretence ſoon preſented itſelf: in the evening, while we were chatting on the occurrences of the day, and the unexpected viſit we had received, a letter was brought me

me from our dear and reſpected friend, telling me that her impatience to embrace us had ariſen to ſuch a height, that ſhe intreated, if Mr. and Mrs. Howard's viſit muſt ſtill be delayed, mine might be deferred no longer; requeſting leave to ſend her own carriage and ſervants to convey me ſafely to Aubrey Caſtle.

This kind, maternal epiſtle, would at all events have determined my compliance, eſpecially as Lady Meredith and Sir William, I find, have left the caſtle, having been ſuddenly recalled home: but at this time it is particularly agreeable, as it at once relieves me from my difficulties in regard to Mr. Howard, removes me from the chance of again meeting the man I ſo anxiouſly wiſh never more to behold, and offers me an opportunity undiſturbed and at a diſtance, for combating the commotions of my mind.

I have written to Lady Aubrey that I ſhall be with her on Saturday evening. Her ſeat is forty five miles diſtant; but by ſetting off very early, I hope to accompliſh my journey without ſleeping on the road, which I ſhould diſlike much. I have accepted the offer of her carriage and ſervants, which are to be here on Thurſday evening.

LETTER

LETTER XXI.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

AUBREY CASTLE, JUNE 21.

I Arrived here laſt night about nine in the evening. The moment I alighted, our dear Lady Aubrey ran out to meet me in the hall. She preſſed me to her boſom in the tendereſt manner, and tears accompanied her embraces.

She led me to her dreſſing room; where, after a thouſand anxious apprehenſions on her part in regard to the fatigue I had undergone in travelling, and as many kind enquiries after my ſiſter and Mr. Howard, I congratulated her with the moſt heartfelt ſatisfaction on the happy improvement of her health, indicated ſo viſibly by the alteration in her looks.

The change is indeed ſtriking. That glow which health and tranquillity only can preſerve, now throws a luſtre over features, the intereſting beauty of which ſeemed before incapable of addition.

Both in mind and body, ſaid that angelic woman, my amendment is wonderful: and how infinitely kind is it in my Hermione thus to ſoothe my heart by gratifying my ardent wiſhes for her company! My ſpirits, thank heaven, are calm and equal; and my frame, at no period robuſt, begins to feel the pleaſing effects of internal peace and compoſure. I do not allow myſelf

myſelf to indulge the ſecluſion to which inclination ſtrongly impels me: on the contrary, I reſpect thoſe exactions which the rights of ſociety require, and the neglect of which I, who have perhaps a long life before me, may yet live to regret. I intend to force myſelf therefore to make proper returns to the viſits and civilities paid me by my country neighbours; and have even already begun to form an intimacy with a very worthy couple, who have hitherto waved all ceremony, and who have been repeatedly my gueſts. They are at preſent with me; and though I ſhould have much preferred the happineſs of ſpending this evening tete a tete with you, I muſt ſubmit to allow them a ſhare of your company.

She then conducted me to the drawing room, where we found a lady and gentleman engaged at picquet She preſented me to both in the kindeſt manner. I ſhall ſay nothing, my dear Madam, ſaid ſhe to the lady, for leaving you my cards ſo long, as I bring my apology along with me in this amiable young friend, who has relieved my apprehenſions by making her appearance at laſt.

Supper was announced immediately after; and as I was fatigued and exhauſted, Lady Aubrey, whoſe ſolicitude and anxiety made her watch every change of my countenance, inſiſted that I ſhould retire early to reſt; and making her excuſes to Mr. and Mrs. Berry, who ſeem very ſenſible, agreeable people, ſhe led me to the chamber allotted me, where having ordered her maid to attend me, and ſatisfied herſelf that every thing was prepared for my comfort and ſatisfaction, ſhe tenderly embraced me and wiſhed me good night.

Juſt

SUNDAY NIGHT.

Juſt as Lady Aubrey, her other gueſts, and myſelf were aſſembled this day at dinner, the arrival of the poſtman with the newſpapers induced Mr. Berry, who is a great politician, to hurry it over in order to read them aloud to the company. His lady, who ſeemed little amuſed by the proſpect of the parliamentary orations, requeſted him to give us the news of the day before ſhe ſet off on her rambles; and in compliance with her deſire, he began the liſt of mortality, in which he ſuddenly read the death of the Right Honourable Lord Linroſe at Lyons. I was extremely ſhocked; though merely from compaſſion for the friends who muſt lament his loſs; and Mr. Berry ſeemed himſelf conſcious of having committed an impropriety in mentioning, in preſence of Lady Aubrey, a name that ſeemed deſtined never again to reach her ears; for I remarked that his voice changed as he read, tho' he had the preſence of mind not to make his thoughts evident by ſtopping before he had finiſhed the ſentence. Lady Aubrey ſeemed ſo much affected by the paragraph that ſhe ſoon after left the room.

I wiſhed much to follow her: but recollecting that any private converſation at that moment muſt naturally have led to ſubjects which I wiſh as much as poſſible in future to avoid, I forebore my intention; and when ſhe returned ſome time after into the room, I rejoiced that I had not given way to my firſt impulſe, as though her eyes were red, ſhe converſed with a ſedate chearfulneſs which teſtified her determination of combating all melancholy retroſpections that might lead to repining and deſpondency,

dency, and ſoon after propoſed conducting me thro' the different apartments of this elegant abode (the morning having been employed at church) which infinitely ſurpaſſed my expectations in point of magnificence. It is much too ſpacious in my opinion for the reſidence of a ſingle, ſolitary individual. However a large eſtabliſhment of ſervants, and a chearful ſituation, in a great meaſure atone for this defect, which Lady Aubrey herſelf remarked to me while we were ſurveying it. It is the ſpot where my predeceſſors have reſided time immemorial, ſaid ſhe; and my grandfather made it an article in his will that I ſhould inhabit the houſe, and not ſuffer it to fall into decay.

There is a collection of moſt valuable pictures; and a large library, where I intend paſſing ſeveral hours every day, ſtored with the works of the beſt authors in all languages. I never was leſs in a mood for ſtudy; but for that very reaſon I muſt endeavour to force a reliſh for every employment that baniſhes muſing. At preſent, however, I am incapable of any exertion; for I am really far from well, and as much exhauſted as if I had gone a journey of five hundred miles at leaſt.

JUNE 24.

Our gueſts left us to-day, which I regret much. Mrs. Berry ſeldom leaves her family even for ſo long a period as a few days, and her preſent viſit was a particular compliment to Lady

Lady Aubrey, to whom I ſuſpect ſhe and her huſband have peculiar obligations.

I have received a letter from Fanny, dated Saturday evening. She writes to inform me of Lord Linroſe's death, with which ſhe had been made acquainted a few hours after I left her, by a note from Mr. Roatſley, merely mentioning the event and the time it took place, as a piece of reſpect due to relations of the family. Mr. Howard, ſhe tells me, wrote a letter of condolence next morning, to which he received a very kind reply, aſſuring him that nothing but the ſhock he has received would have prevented his being at Hubert Hill long before now. Lord Belmont, he ſays, who has been ſeverely wounded by this blow, meant to ſet off directly for England. He muſt be already on his journey, adds Mr. Roatſley; and as I intend meeting him at Calais, I flatter myſelf I ſhall ſoon merit his grateful acknowledgments for the eſſential ſervice I mean to confer upon him—that of conſoling him in a great meaſure for what death has ſnatched from his arms, by preſenting to him relations who muſt and who ought be be ſo dear to his heart.

Fanny tells me, likewiſe, that ſhe hears Lady Linroſe and her family are ſoon to leave Holtenham Abbey, and to ſet out for Northamptonſhire. She makes no doubt, ſhe ſays, but Roatſley will call at Hubert Hill before his departure. Poor Lady Linroſe, it ſeems, is much afflicted; and their ſtay with Lady Mary is to be no longer prolonged than till her Ladyſhip's ſpirits will admit of the exertion of a removal.

This letter, which I received laſt night in Lady Aubrey's preſence, and with which I withdrew to a window to read, threw an air of ſuch depreſſion

depreſſion over my countenance, that on turning round ſhe enquired with anxious apprehenſion, if all were well at Hubert Hill. This hint made me exert myſelf to appear chearful; but I fancy I could not boaſt of my ſucceſs. Since my arrival here Lady Aubrey has never recurred to thoſe painful ſubjects which burſt from her in the moments of agitation at Hubert Hill; and I could not have read my ſiſter's letter to her without calling back her thoughts to many diſmal reflections, the natural reſult of being told that Lord Belmont was on his way to England.

JUNE 28.

Our ſtyle of living here is ſo rational and ſerene, and Lady Aubrey's tenderneſs and attention towards me ſo unremitting and endearing, that I ſhould be happy in future to divide my time equally between Hubert Hill and Aubrey Caſtle. Lady Aubrey's converſation is a never-failing ſource of intereſt and amuſement. Her heart is ſo benevolent, and her underſtanding ſo highly cultivated, that it is impoſſible ever to tire in her company, or deſire other ſociety. I am only diſtreſſed that ſhe remarks my thoughtfulneſs; and is become ſo uneaſy about my loſs of appetite and pallid colour, that ſhe quite tortures herſelf with uneaſy apprehenſions, for which I cannot convince her there is not the ſlighteſt cauſe.

She begins to fear an approaching conſumption; though I have aſſured her my lungs are made of adamant, and never were ſuſpected of weakneſs

weakneſs in my life. This day ſhe has actually conſulted Doctor Elton, who has partly relieved her by declaring a journey to Briſtol wholly unneceſſary. He ſays my complaints are nervous, and adviſes me to try the effects of change of air and amuſement—in other words that he don't know what to make of them: and Lady Aubrey has reſolved that we ſhall ſet off in all haſte upon a viſit to Sir Aſhton and Lady Hilbury; the latter of whom is ſiſter to Sir William Meredith. Lady Aubrey has repeatedly rejected a number of preſſing invitations from this family, as ſhe had no intention of viſiting at ſuch a diſtance from home; but the notion of travelling, which ſhe imagines will be of ſervice to me, has determined her on going. There is a vaſt reſort of company at Hilbury Lodge; and ſhe kindly flatters herſelf I ſhall be amuſed. But the very idea of leaving this place is diſagreeable to me; and the proſpect of a journey feels like an exertion that fatigues my ſpirits.

H. SEYMOUR.

LETTER XXII.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

HILBURY LODGE, JULY 1.

WE arrived here laſt night after a pleaſant journey. The weather was very favourable, and the country thro' which we paſſed ſo beautiful, that I was much more pleaſed than I expected to have been. I am conſiderably ſtronger

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ſince we ſet out, and but for a languor and depreſſion which ſtill hang upon me, ſhould think myſelf quite well.

The family here conſiſts of Sir Aſhton, his Lady, and a large party of viſitors. They reſide conſtantly in the country, and live in what is called the ſtyle of old Engliſh hoſpitality.—They received us with much kindneſs and cordiality, and we ſat down to ſupper twenty in number in a large hall, the walls of which are decorated with family portraits of ancient grandmothers and maiden aunts, dreſſed in the faſhions of their days, with a roſe in the hand, and a ſmirk on the countenance of each.

JULY 2.

A ſervant who was ordered to remain behind on ſome buſineſs of Lady Aubrey's, and to join us here to-day, has brought me another letter from Fanny, which arrived the day I left the Caſtle. I beſought her to write to me frequently, and ſhe has moſt conſcientiouſly performed her promiſe. She tells me that Lord Linroſe, as he muſt now be called, paid them that morning a viſit. He ſeems much affected by his brother's death, ſhe ſays, and looks extremely melancholy and depreſſed. He expreſſed in ſtrong terms his diſappointment at my abſence, and informed them he was to ſet off for Calais on the 12th of July, where he expected by that time to find Lord Belmont already arrived; if not, his Lordſhip had ſo ſettled his route that he ſhould probably meet with him a ſtage or two further on.

Lady

Lady Linroſe and the young ladies were next day to leave Holtenham Abbey. My ſiſter adds a circumſtance, for ſhe is very minute, which was before unknown to me: I always imagined that Roatſley had made one of the family at Lady Mary's, but ſhe mentions that he has merely viſited there from time to time during the diſtreſs of his mother and ſiſters, having lodged at the houſe of his ſteward, (his own manſion not yet being ready for his reception), who has a ſmall farm on his eſtate. I ſuppoſe ſome punctilio relating to his ſituation with Lady Elizabeth occaſions this diſtance and formality.

This letter was accompanied by one from Mr. Howard, dated the day after, in which he informs me, that the evening before Sir Edward Sudbury had paid him a viſit. A compliment, ſays he, which is entirely to be laid to your account; for nothing could exceed his evident diſappointment and regret on finding you were from home. After expreſſing it in terms ſufficiently plain, he demanded a private conference with me, entreated my intereſt with you in his favour, and requeſted permiſſion on your return to repeat his viſits as your declared admirer. I told him, continues Mr. Howard, that all I could promiſe him was my good wiſhes, as I was wholly ignorant of your ſentiments in regard to him; nor could I undertake to further his ſuit in any other manner than that of paving the way for his propoſal, by preparing you for it. I likewiſe told him you was not expected home for many weeks, and perhaps might even remain abſent for a much longer period. Sir Edward eagerly caught at this propoſal; requeſting I would loſe no time in executing it, and deſiring me to acquaint you that he earneſtly

entreats permiſſion to attend you at Aubrey Caſtle.

Regarding myſelf as Sir Edward's agent, concludes Mr. Howard, I cannot avoid adding, that poſſeſſed of an excellent character, an affluent fortune, and a good figure and addreſs, any woman, whoſe affections are not otherwiſe engaged, muſt enjoy a fair proſpect of happineſs in an union with him.

I had ſcarce finiſhed reading this letter, when the bell ſummoned me to dinner. Our party, large as it was, had gained the addition of ſeveral fox-hunting gentlemen, who ſat down to table in their boots, with their cropped hair quite free from powder, and in a dreſs that would have diſgraced their footmen. Being the firſt of this claſs I have ſeen, I was ſo much aſtoniſhed by their appearance, that I could not credit my ears, when Lady Hilbury, introducing one of them to me, called him Sir John ſomething or other, for I have forgot his ſurname.

JULY 3.

The moment I was alone with Lady Aubrey laſt night, I mentioned to her the ſubſtance of Mr. Howard's letter. Well, my love, ſaid ſhe, and pray what are the objections to the match? Are there any deficiencies in point of fortune? If ſo, eaſily can theſe be removed; for is not my Hermione my own child; the child of my boſom? and ſhe embraced me affectionately.

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I inſtantly ſatisfied her that the obſtacles againſt it reſulted merely from the feelings of my heart, which were wholly repugnant to the union; and a thouſand times I thanked her for the kind adoption; a tye which I told her, and told her with ſincerity, I had neither wiſh nor intention of weakening by any other that might divide my affections.

I am much miſtaken, ſaid ſhe ſmiling, and looking me earneſtly in the face, if my Hermione's heart is formed for the reception of no warmer ſentiments than thoſe a fond mother can hope to excite.

A bluſh of conſcious confeſſion tinged my cheeks. I replied that Sir Edward, at leaſt, never would rival that dear mother in my heart; nor could I perſuade myſelf that any attachment, however violent, would for an inſtant diminiſh or interfere with that fervent affection for her, which conſtituted almoſt the firſt happineſs of my exiſtence: and indeed, Sophia, I did not exaggerate my feelings in expreſſing them thus warmly; for my unexpected intimacy with this angelic woman has produced an intereſt that ſupports my ſinking ſpirits, and feels like the acquiſition of a new ſenſe that gives life and energy to all the others.

Well, my love, ſaid ſhe, I live in hopes of one day witneſſing that you make good your promiſe. If I loſe your regard, I loſe all that attaches me to my preſent ſtate of being. But I am not ſo ſelfiſh as to deſire to engroſs it wholly. Your felicity is my firſt and deareſt wiſh; and I would not ſecure my own at the price of diminiſhing yours. I hope therefore to ſee you happily ſettled, in that ſtate which undoubtedly

is capable of producing, and often does beſtow, the higheſt degree of comfort.

I have written in the ſtrongeſt terms to Mr. Howard, requeſting him to inform Sir Edward that it is impoſſible for me to grant permiſſion for a viſit which would put him to the trouble of a fruitleſs and unneceſſary journey.

JULY 6.

This houſe is by much too gay for an invalid. Different viſitors ſucceed each other daily; and the ſame obſervation is repeatedly made—"I'm afraid, Ma'am, you an't well." I am quite teized with it. Lady Aubrey has conſulted an able phyſician here, who has aſſured her there is nothing in the leaſt alarming in my complaint, and has preſcribed early hours, regularity of living, and aſſes milk, which reſtoratives are to be procured with much greater eaſe and convenience at Aubrey Caſtle, than in this hoſpitable family; where the conſtant buſtle of a number of people, and the neceſſity of ſubmitting to the eſtabliſhed hours, prevents that compoſure and quiet ſo ſalutary to weak health. Lady Aubrey I am ſure finds it equally uncomfortable, and has readily agreed to my requeſt of ſhortening our viſit.

JULY 7.

After ſundry remonſtrances, and innumerable preſſing intreaties to prolong our ſtay, Lady Aubrey has at length made her point good, and we are to depart on Monday.

Were

Were I in better ſpirits, I might divert you not a little with an account of the different people I have met with ſince our abode here, particularly with this fox hunting baronet, Sir John Bennet, who profeſſes himſelf my admirer, tho' our acquaintance has not been of above a few days ſtanding, and who makes downright love to Lady Aubrey, in hopes ſhe will give him an invitation to Aubrey Caſtle. I wonder any man can think of me, when Lady Aubrey is preſent. It is amazing that every man who ſees her is not diſtractedly in love with her. She is not yet thirty ſix; and tho' the ſtile of dreſs in which ſhe indulges, indicates a more advanced period, her countenance is uncommonly youthful.

JULY 9.

I was quite aſtoniſhed tto day on entering the drawing room to find Sir Edward Sudbury. As it was ſcarce poſſible he could have been made acquainted with the contents of my reply to Mr. Howard's letter, which was only ſent away on Friday laſt, I knew not what to make of this viſit, which he ſoon took an opportunity of inſinuating had been the ſudden conſequence of his being accidentally informed that I was at Hilbury Lodge, with which family he is intimately acquainted. I ſuppoſe he muſt have conſidered permiſſion to wait on me at Aubrey Caſtle at leaſt as very precarious; and I imagine regarded this circumſtance as a favourable oppor-

portunity for urging his ſuit without unpoliteneſs or impropriety.

I endeavoured, by the gravity and reſerve with which I attended to him, to explain what reception his propoſal was likely to receive, and if poſſible to deter him from a a purſuit that could only be ſucceeded by mortification and uneaſineſs; but Sir Edward was in unbounded ſpirits, and would take no hint that ſeemed repugnant to his wiſhes. When our departure tomorrow however was accidentally mentioned by Lady Hilbury in the courſe of the evening, a cloud ſuddenly overcaſt poor Sir Edward's countenance, his vivacity forſook him, and with a very ſubmiſſive but melancholy countenance he ſeized a moment while the company were ſettling their card parties, to requeſt leave to have the honour of attending us, and beſought that I would allow him to entreat Lady Aubrey's permiſſion.

I told him gravely that it was wholly out of my power to grant his requeſt. The apprehenſion of deceiving him, and the deſire of putting a ſpeedy period to hopes which deluded only to render the diſappointment more painful, made me pronounce theſe few words in a voice ſo determined, that my heart inſtantly reproached me for the pain I was conſtrained to inflict; while its ſecret feelings explained to me ſo powerfully what Sir Edward's muſt prove. I therefore added, tho' with equal ſteadineſs, that I ſhould always remain ſenſible of the favour he intended me.

Having forced myſelf to be thus explicit, diſtreſſing as it was, I haſtily turned away; and Sir Edward, thunder-ſtruck at my prohibition, inſtantly left the room. He did not appear for

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ſome hours; and during the whole evening repeated enquiries of where he could be, and expreſſions of wonder what he could have done with himſelf, were made by the whole company.

Sir Edward at length entered; but not till we were all ſeated at ſupper. He ſupported the general attack with much embarraſſment; and ſaid in excuſe for his abſence, that he had been enjoying this delightful evening along the ſide of the canal. This occaſioned much mirth. The refinement of his taſte was admired, his neglect of the ladies at the card party heartily laughed at, and finally it was determined that, as the ſole excuſe his failure in politeneſs would admit of, he muſt make a formal acknowledgment to the company that he was deeply involved in a hopeleſs paſſion, in which caſe only the ladies agreed to accord him their forgiveneſs.

How Sir Edward looked, on this raillery, I know not, for I was little leſs confuſed than himſelf, and did not once dare to throw my eyes that way. His awkwardneſs was matter of additional entertainment; and ſince he would not make a verbal confeſſion, Lady Hilbury told him his ſilence ſhould be taken as proof poſitive.

Lady Aubrey, with her uſual humanity, diſtreſſed at this perſecution, fortunately relieved poor Sir Edward by hinting a wiſh to retire early on account of our journey to-morrow; and we ſeparated at leaſt an hour ſooner than uſual.

I attended her to her dreſſing room; where diſmiſſing her maid—I cannot help being rather ſurpriſed, my dear, ſaid ſhe. This Sir Edward appears a very amiable young man, and his behaviour this evening convinces me that he is tenderly attached to you. Is your determi-

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nation ſtill to reject him? does your heart ſay nothing in his favour?

Oh! nothing, nothing indeed, cried I. I pity and feel for his diſappointment; but to be his wife would render me miſerable for ever.

I ſpoke with ſuch unneceſſary warmth, when I had been liſtening to no arguments that could have rouſed my oppoſition, and had no ſolicitations to apprehend from the tenderneſs of my dear Lady Aubrey, that ſhe looked at me ſome moments with a face of perplexity. Then heaven forbid you ſhould be his wife, my love. I do not mean to become the advocate of a man of whom I have ſeen ſo little. I am too conſcious of the ineſtimable value of my Hermione's heart, not to be as nice in my choice of the man on whom ſhe is to beſtow it, as ſhe can poſſibly be for herſelf. I am only ſurpriſed that a heart, young, warm, and enthuſiaſtic, which has been in a manner ſecluded from intercourſe with mankind, and which cannot for that reaſon have been either tainted with the vanity of general admiration or deluded with the deſtructive idea that in high birth and titles a gratification is to be ſought, unattainable in a more moderate ſphere: I am ſurpriſed, I repeat, that a heart like yours ſhould have remained unmoved by the aſſiduities of a man, whoſe outward appearance ſpeaks ſo highly in his favor, and whoſe character you allow to be eſtimable and even amiable.

To this obſervation I could make no anſwer. To a friend ſo dear, ſo reſpectable, ſo kindly and warmly intereſted in my felicity, to have given an evaſive and diſingenuous reply, was impoſſible. Gratitude and affection condemned the very idea. Yet to make a confeſſion of the

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ſtate of my affections, to avow that a ſecret and hopeleſs attachment devoured my peace, deſtroyed my health, and ſteeled my heart againſt the ſolicitations of all men but one, was equally impracticable. Oh Sophia! ſuch an avowal muſt have been humiliating, ſo painfully ſevere, it muſt have led beſides to a train of particulars ſo interwoven with Lady Aubrey's misfortunes, that this act of confidence might have given no leſs pain to her feelings than it muſt have conveyed to mine. After heſitating therefore for a moment, whether from reſpect due to the beloved friend who honoured me with the name of daughter, I ſhould not throw myſelf into her arms and inſtantly confeſs my weakneſs, I found that love was to her a ſubject I could not force myſelf to mention.

Theſe ideas, which paſſed with the velocity of lightning through my mind, ſealed up my lips; and Lady Aubrey perceiving that I was embarraſſed, expreſſed a deſire to go to reſt, and kindly wiſhed me a good night, which afforded me an opportunity of retiring. I am convinced however, that painful as might have been the communication, I ſhould undoubtedly have avowed all at that moment had not the above mentioned apprehenſion deterred me.

On entering my chamber, I perceived a letter directed for me; which I found was the fruits of Sir Edward's moonlight meditations, and muſt have conſiderably ſhortened his walk. I ſuppoſe he had bribed one of the maids to lay it on my toilet.

Adieu, my dear, dear Sophia. My eyes are quite ſunk with ſleep.

LETTER XXIII.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

AUBREY CASTLE, JULY 13.

WE are returned here, to my inexpreſſible ſatisfaction; and if the perturbation of my ſpirits will allow of any kind of method or connexion in my narrative, pray receive the particulars which occurred immediately on our arrival

We ſet off early on Monday laſt. Poor Sir Edward! his uneaſineſs at ſeeing us depart was very apparent, But as I muſt haſten to more intereſting circumſtances, I ſhall merely tell you, that having in his letter deſired leave to receive his ſentence, as he called it, from Lady Aubrey's lips, I intreated her at once to put a final period to his ſuit; which ſhe accordingly contrived to do during a ſhort walk on the terrace after breakfaſt. He was much ſhocked, ſhe ſaid, but ſeemed to regard his diſmiſſion as poſitive and unalterable.

We arrived pretty late at the caſtle Lady Aubrey, after ordering tea, of which ſhe is particularly fond, left the room to give ſome family orders, and ſoon after the houſekeeper entered and preſented to me a letter, which ſhe told me had been brought three days after my departure, by a ſervant, who finding I was from home, enquired when I was expected to return;

return; and being informed that our abſence was only deſigned for a week at moſt, he left it in ſtrict charge to the houſekeeper, telling her it muſt be given into Miſs Seymour's own hands, and requeſting particular care might be taken of it.

This appearance of precaution conveyed an idea into the good woman that probably the letter contained bills for money; which ſuſpicion induced her, inſtead of ſending it by poſt to Hilbury Lodge, on finding our ſtay prolonged, to lock it carefully in her drawer till our arrival ſhould put it in her power to diſcharge her truſt faithfully.

A gentleman, ſhe added, had called that very morning, and having enquired for the houſekeeper, had aſked what was become of the letter given into her hands by a ſervant a fortnight before; and finding we were that day expected, had requeſted her to preſent it to me immediately on my arrival.

This prelude alarmed me, tho' I knew not why. The woman withdrew: I opened it in trepidation: and what was my aſtoniſhment and agitation on perceiving the ſignature of Linroſe. I ſunk breathleſs into a chair, and ſcarce credited the ſenſe which enabled me to peruſe the following lines.

When I conſider that perhaps at this moment Miſs Seymour does me the injuſtice to imagine me the moſt inſenſible, the moſt ungrateful of mankind, I tremble to addreſs her; and when I reflect, that from an unhappy fatality of events it is not impoſſible but that to theſe accuſations, cruel and injurious, may be

ſuper-

ſuperadded thoſe of inconſiſtency and duplicity, I am wholly bereft of the compoſure with which I would wiſh to enter on an explanation of my conduct.

Ah! Madam, is it then poſſible that you ſuſpect not only the tenderneſs of my heart, but its honour and integrity; that you conclude me ſo devoid of principle, ſo loſt to ſhame, as to offer vows to you which are the right of another? Ah! loveliеſt, moſt amiable of women! ſink me not in my own eſtimation by acknowledging I was ever for an inſtant depraved ſo low in your's. Believe me not capable of a deed ſo baſe; a deed—for which violence of paſſion and force of temptation, even of ſuch temptation as in that caſe I muſt have had to encounter, afford but impotent and feeble palliations. No, Madam, had I been fettered by the ſlighteſt ties, had my heart ſought to inſinuate itſelf into the boſom of ſenſibility, and ſucceſs afterwards ungratefully ſickened me at the purſuit, my love, my adoration of Miſs Seymour, might have tortured my boſom, but never ſhould it have paſſed my lips.

A chain of particulars, too intricate, too tedious for diſtant diſcuſſion, has led to the unfortunate and miſtaken notion of my approaching union—particulars which, when I have the honour of ſeeing you, I hope you will have the goodneſs to allow me to explain; in the mean while, for the ſake of Heaven, permit me to exiſt by the flattering hope, that the cruel and ſudden reverſe in your behaviour, from ſoftneſs the moſt captivating, the moſt angelic, to the coldeſt ſeverity and the moſt barbarous reſerve, owed its ſource ſolely to this perplexing report. Forgive me, Miſs Seymour, for recalling your thoughts

thoughts to recollections, which, daſhed as they are with bitterneſs, dwell on my memory with ſenſations of delight, gratitude, and exultation, that never but with my laſt expiring ſigh can be eraſed from my heart: yet what a painful allay ſucceeded to this moment of happineſs! your downcaſt look, and ſilent haſte to eſcape from me, were not the bluſhing effects of the timid and diffident regret with which you reflected on the ſoftneſs you could not wholly and cruelly diſguiſe from the man who adored you, and who, ſupplicating at your feet, claimed ſurely ſome little ſenſibility to a paſſion that has ſo long proved the deſtruction of his peace. Ah no! theſe amiable ſufferings had already inflicted too much pain, had already encreaſed if poſſible my enthuſiaſtic admiration, even while I lamented their poignancy, and partook of the uneaſineſs they occaſioned you. No! you ſuſpected my honour, you believed me unworthy of your ſlighteſt regard; and a rigour the moſt inflexible taking place of ſofter emotions, barred every avenue to your heart, and rendered it inacceſſible to all my prayers and entreaties.

Why this vindication was not earlier attempted, may probably ſurpriſe you. But while your behaviour perplexed and tormented me, this explanation of its ſeverity never once occurred to my imagination; till it was this day happily ſuggeſted, from having been informed that the rumours reſpecting my engagements were ſo ſerious and ſo current, as to gain univerſal credit.

Miſs Seymour may believe, that after parting from her at a moment ſo arduous, I did not mean to allow twenty-four hours to elapſe without imploring her to acquaint me wherein I had had the

the misfortune to offend her: on the contrary I intended to have written from Holtenham Abbey, where I was engaged to ſpend the day, to have demanded my accuſation, and juſtified myſelf in her opinion; but on my arrival there, which was not till late, what a ſcene awaited me—my mother and ſiſters had juſt received the account of my brother's death; and in the firſt moments of deſpair, were weeping over the letter that had announced this fatal intelligence. To Miſs Seymour, I am not afraid to confeſs, that this ſevere ſtroke drove for ſome time all other ideas from my thoughts; even her beloved image was obſcured, and every tender recollection ſupplanted by grief: but reflections ſo long cheriſhed, ſo dear to the heart, cannot long lie dormant in the mind; and I ſoon found that the amiable ſource of all my hopes and expectations of happineſs in life, could alone heal the wounds which death had inflicted.

In acquainting my friends at Hubert Hill with this misfortune, I imagined I offered a ſufficient apology both for my ſilence and my abſence: but what was my concern this day, upon viſiting them, to find that at nearly fifty miles diſtance, you muſt have remained for ſeveral days ignorant of the melancholy event that had rendered me incapable of paying you my devoirs! Ah! Madam, what muſt your opinion of me have been during this interval? and how muſt this apparent neglect have augmented and confirmed every ſuſpicion of my guilt?

Forgive me, I entreat you, for having thus long treſpaſſed on your time and patience. But at preſent, alas! I have no other means of approaching you. My mother I cannot leave in her deep, heart-felt diſtreſs, till my journey to Dover,

Dover, where I muſt be by the 12th, obliges me to depart. Yet I have a thouſand things to trouble you with. Will you allow me, in my way thither, to pay you my reſpects? Will you condeſcend to introduce me to the ineſtimable Lady Aubrey, the contemplation of whoſe character elevates my mind? And will you deign to hear me at your feet implore the continuance of your favour to him who has the honour of ſubſcribing himſelf

your moſt obedient,
and devoted ſervant,

LINROSE.

HILTON FARM, JUNE 28.

The tumult of my mind on peruſing this aſtoniſhing letter, was unutterable. My ſenſes were almoſt annihilated; and a ſenſation of diſtruſt and conſternation half perſuaded me to doubt if what I read, really came from the hands of Lord Linroſe.

In this ſtate of perturbation I was ſurpriſed by Lady Aubrey, who entered the drawing-room while I was ſo wholly abſorbed in ſecret gratitude and delight, that unconſcious of obſervation, I repeated aloud, claſping my hands together, good God! is it poſſible?

My dear, cried ſhe, approaching in haſte, ſurpriſed at the ſituation in which ſhe beheld me—for Heaven's ſake tell me, what is the matter?

This queſtion awakened me from the confuſion that had ſeized all my faculties. But unable to reply, I could only anſwer by preſſing the hand that had ſo kindly ſeized mine.

My

My agitation aſtoniſhed and alarmed her: for the two extremes of pleaſure and diſtreſs, are upon a curſory view very ſimilar in their effects. She imagined ſome ſudden calamity had overwhelmed me; and preſſing me with ſympathetic tenderneſs to her boſom, entreated me to tell her what had given me ſo much pain.

I could not avoid ſmiling at the expreſſion; and haſtened to acquaint her that I had no ſubject for uneaſineſs. I bluſh for myſelf, deareſt Madam, ſaid I; but you I well know will be all indulgence to the weakneſs which in a moment of ſuch unſpeakable agitation I am unable to overcome. I have a long, long tale to diſcloſe to you. My heart has been humbled, mortified and oppreſſed; and I am certain your goodneſs will allow of ſome excuſe in the ſudden, ſoothing relief it has ſo unexpectedly received.

That tale can never appear long to me, of which my Hermione is the heroine. But do ſit down and compoſe yourſelf. I believe I can almoſt gueſs the moſt material points of the ſtory. Is there not a hero in the tale, my love? at leaſt ſo I have long ſuſpected; though I forbore giving you the pain of ſoliciting your confidence, which I was certain would not have been denied me but for particular reaſons that muſt have rendered the communication diſtreſſing.

Oh! Madam, I will tell you all, cried I, penetrated with her goodneſs; and be aſſured no ungrateful doubt of your kind ſympathy and indulgence induced me to lock up my ſecret pangs in my own boſom. Ah! no! diffidence and baſhfulneſs alone at firſt deterred me from entering upon ſo awkward a ſubject; and afterwards, ſince my reſidence here, I have not only anxiouſly

anxiouſly wiſhed that all the world might remain in ignorance of what has paſſed, but that if poſſible I might baniſh it for ever from my own remembrance.

But as your paſt uneaſineſs ſeems, if I may judge from the intelligence of your countenance, to have given way to happier proſpects, I hope you are going to have the goodneſs to ſatisfy my curioſity. The man who has created ſuch ravages in the boſom of my Hermione, has no little reaſon to be vain, and I am convinced muſt merit the diſtinction, elſe he would not have enjoyed it; but pray tell me who is he? I cannot poſſibly have ſeen him, yet I feel I am already in his intereſts.

He is one of my relations, Madam, anſwered I, heſitating. He is my couſin; and the grandſon——

Of Lord Belmont, interrupted Lady Aubrey. I have frequently heard of the young man while abroad, and his friends talked loudly in his favour; and though my connexion with the family has been long laid aſide, I have ever retained ſecretly in my heart a ſtrong and lively partiality for the good old man and all his children. A tear ruſhed into her eye as ſhe ſpoke. The huſband of Hermione, continued ſhe, muſt ever have poſſeſſed my warmeſt regard, but I ſhall not love him leſs, for the many recollections——

Oh! Madam! cried I, ſobbing in her arms, for the ſake of Heaven baniſh all painful recollections. Let the paſt be ſunk in oblivion. Look only forward. Think of nothing but the conſolation, the ſalutary comfort which a heart like your's is formed to experience from the unalterable duty, gratitude, and affection of thoſe highly

highly favoured children of your adoption, who honour you with filial piety, and love you with enthuſiaſtic fervour.

Be not diſtreſſed, my dear, ſaid ſhe, recovering her ſedate compoſure; my heart is far from ſad at this moment. How indeed ſhould it be ſo at a moment when my daughter's countenance brightens with ſecret complacency through her tears!

She then once more entreated me to be explicit; and beginning at the epocha of our rencontre in the packet boat, I related ſincerely and without diſguiſe every circumſtance in which Lord Linroſe had been concerned.

Lady Aubrey liſtened with the kindeſt and moſt anxious ſolicitude, and entered with intereſt into all my emotions. She felt for my diſappointments, rejoiced when any intervals of gratification ſeemed to afford me a recompence for my ſufferings, exulted at the generoſity of Lord Linroſe's conduct, and ſhed tears at Lord Belmont's cruelty. He is reckoned by many a rigid character, ſaid ſhe, but to me he was ever all gentleneſs and condeſcenſion; and even his faults I am convinced have their origin in virtue. He is ſtrict, and perhaps may be eſteemed ſevere; but that ſeverity is the reſult of a rectitude of heart, which, being ſubject to few weakneſſes, poſſeſſes little indulgence for errors it never knew. His benevolence is warm, and his feelings but too keen. Where they have ſuffered from the miſconduct of others, his reſentment is proportioned to what he has endured. But his conduct in regard to his grand children is by no means in tone with the general tenor of his principles, which are founded on ſtrict juſtice and unbiaſſed integrity. It leads me to imagine

gine that ſome previous prepoſſeſſion muſt have taken root in his mind; and it is not unlikely that Lady Linroſe, (being herſelf deceived), may have occaſioned, or at leaſt confirmed this diſguſt, even without the ſlighteſt deliberate deſign of injuring your cauſe. At all events, on his arrival all can be eaſily and effectually explained; and you have now but little reaſon to dread his inflexibility, while you poſſeſs an advocate ſo thoroughly well diſpoſed as Lord Linroſe, to exert all his rhetoric in your behalf.

I had juſt ſatisfied her in regard to the part Lady Linroſe had acted, and concluded my narrative, acknowledging my aſtoniſhment and perturbation on receiving an explanation ſo unlooked for of the ſeeming inconſiſtencies in Lord Linroſe's conduct, when a note was brought me from him. He was, as I had ſuſpected from the houſekeeper's account, and as his own letter led me to imagine, on his way to Dover; and wrote from the inn, on the great road, about four miles from this place.

He laments his diſappointment on finding I was not yet returned when he called this morning, and requeſts leave to be allowed to wait on me to-morrow morning.

The moment I had read this note, I gave it to Lady Aubrey, who deſired me to offer her compliments to his Lordſhip, and to requeſt in her name the favour of his company to-morrow at breakfaſt.

I then withdrew to my dreſſing-room to anſwer it. Glad of a pretext for being a few moments alone, I threw myſelf into a chair, and gave way to a reverie of the moſt enchanting nature. What a revolution in my mind had a few hours effected! What a reverſe, from the de-

depreſſion that had but that very morning almoſt wholly overpowered me! My ſpirits were elevate to a degree of enthuſiaſm; and I thanked the Almighty with a fervour till now unfelt for the delightful proſpect that on all ſides ſurrounded me. I ſat down at length to my bureau. Had my pen followed the dictates of my heart, I knew I ſhould have committed my note to the flames, inſtead of ſending it away: yet I could not affect a cold ceremony, ſo oppoſite to my own feelings and to that affection which Lord Linroſe had declared in terms of ſo much warmth. Here is what I was obliged to reſt ſatisfied with at laſt.

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE LORD LINROSE.

I muſt confeſs my aſtoniſhment on having a letter from Lord Linroſe put this evening into my hands, immediately on my return to Aubrey Caſtle. I will not affect a reſerve ſo foreign to my feelings, and ſo injurious to the favourable ſentiments with which your Lordſhip honours me, as to deny that my ſurpriſe at its contents was not unmixed with pleaſure, and that the peruſal relieved me from much perplexity, and even uneaſineſs.

Lady Aubrey, of whoſe elevated qualities you have formed ſo juſt an idea, anxiouſly deſires the pleaſure of knowing you. She requeſts your Lordſhip's company at breakfaſt to-morrow: and permit me to aſſure you of a favourable reception from all the preſent inhabitants of her reſidence.

H. SEYMOUR.

AUBREY CASTLE, JUNE 13.

Having

Having diſpatched my note, I returned to Lady Aubrey. Oh! Sophia! how amiable, how exalted is this woman! Her ſpirits were this evening exhilarated even to gaiety, her eyes ſparkled with pleaſure, and the agonizing recollections which remembrance might be ſuppoſed on this occaſion to have naturally renewed, were wholly ſuppreſſed or rather ſupplanted by the project of my approaching happineſs. She aſked me a thouſand queſtions in regard to Lord Linroſe; made me minutely deſcribe his perſon, and inſiſted on my ſhewing her a little ſketch on ivory, which at Hilbury Lodge ſoothed many a melancholy hour, but which I had at length determined to deſtroy, as it afforded an inſinuating indulgence extremely ill adapted to that victory over my ſenſibility which I have ſo often attempted without ſucceſs. This preliminary towards conquering my weakneſs, you will perhaps ſagely obſerve, ought to have been the firſt ſtep. I grant it; but indeed you muſt be preciſely in my ſituation before you can prove an adequate judge of the difficulties of ſuch a ſacrifice.

We ſeparated early; and I have been writing while I ought to have been in bed. But I have little chance of ſleeping; though the weakneſs of my frame at preſent renders the agitations of the day ſo violent on my ſpirits, that I feel quite exhauſted, and think of to-morrow's interview even with ſome degree of apprehenſion. Yes, Sophia; for is not there ſomething formidable in the idea of ſeeing Lord Linroſe after the weakneſs of my behaviour at our laſt meeting?

I had

JULY 14.

I had no inclination to ſleep when I gave over writing laſt night, but I began to conſider that if I did not contrive to get a few hours reſt after the mental and bodily fatigues of the preceding day, I ſhould look ſtill more like a ghoſt than I already do; and really you never beheld any thing ſo pale and ſo ugly as I am grown of late.

I ſuſpect however my complexion was ſufficiently florid this morning, when Lord Linroſe entered the breakfaſting parlour; where dreading the formality of being called down to him, I rather choſe to be ready to receive him.

Lady Aubrey was not yet ſtirring, ſo that we were tete-a-tete. But I cannot give you all the particulars of our converſation. A love interview, except to the parties immediately concerned, is always abſurd; but I fancy you will ſhrewdly ſuſpect that I found nothing extremely ridiculous in the eager urgency with which Lord Linroſe, after an explanation the moſt impaſſioned, entreated my permiſſion to apply to Lord Belmont for his conſent and approbation, the inſtant he found a favourable opportunity for intereſting himſelf in my affairs, tho' my confuſion during part of the ſcene might perhaps have afforded *you* ſome amuſement.

He ſpoke with ſuch feeling of my ſeverity, as he called it, and of my condeſcenſion with ſo many expreſſions of gratitude and obligation, that he half baniſhed the ſhame which the recollection recalled; but I beſought him never more to mention, and if poſſible to forget, all that had paſſed.

I think,

I think, cried he ſmiling, I ſhall find it no eaſy matter to comply with that injunction; for I have abſolutely exiſted upon the remembrance ever ſince I had the happineſs of ſeeing you; and undoubtedly you cannot have the cruelty to wiſh to deprive me of the memory of one bleſſed moment that recompenſed me for the anguiſh of the tedious hours that ſucceeded. Oh! Miſs Seymour! added he, how could you leave me with ſuch frigid abruptneſs? How could you poiſon and embitter the joy with which the delighted diſcovery of your pitying ſympathy had overwhelmed me? Yet what muſt your opinion have been of me during the unhappy period of my ſilence? How muſt you have deſpiſed the man, who one day vowing eternal fidelity at your feet with all the urgency of paſſionate affection, could the next apparently relinquiſh his hopes, and abandon a purſuit to which a reward, a prize is annext, that may well fix the moſt fickle, and animate the moſt phlegmatic lover, that ever pretended to the paſſion. Alas! you knew not the blow, which, from overpowering my ſpirits, rendered me for ſome time wholly incapable even of explaining myſelf on this intereſting ſubject; till a viſit from Bradſhaw, a few days after, led me in the confidence of friendſhip, partly to confeſs to him my ſituation in regard to you. I owned that a fortunate moment had inſpired me with courage to declare the paſſion, which he well knew had ſo long tormented me with all the miſery of continual apprehenſion, doubt, and uneaſineſs. I acknowledged that Miſs Seymour had liſtened to me with angelic ſoftneſs; but that her behaviour had all at once betrayed a diſpleaſure for which ſhe had not deigned to aſſign a cauſe; and

that

that ſhe had left me with abrupt haſte, notwithſtanding my moſt earneſt intreaties only for a few moments ſtay.

Bradſhaw at once cleared up my doubts, enabled me to comprehend what had appeared ſo unaccountably myſterious, and by informing me of the credit with which the report of my marriage has been circulated (a report, he told me, which even Miſs Seymour herſelf had once hinted to him), enabled me by an immediate explanation to relieve my own mind, and convince her's of the injuſtice of her ſuſpicions.

His Lordſhip then entered more fully into the particulars which have given riſe to the idea. Circumſtances, ſaid he, have lately diſcovered to me that Lord Mortonbury and my grandfather very early formed the plan of a connexion between Lady Elizabeth and myſelf. The young lady's rank, fortune, and accompliſhments, undoubtedly render her an object of ſingular importance to thoſe who look in matrimony for nothing beyond ſuch advantages; and Lord Belmont flattered himſelf the friendſhip which ſubſiſted between the two families, by affording opportunities for frequent intercourſe, would facilitate his wiſhes. This plan however, like moſt others which reſt on adventitious events, failed of ſucceſs; my early intimacy with Lady Elizabeth, far from promoting warmer ſentiments, merely ſerved to diſcover to me thoſe little foibles which in a leſſer or greater degree pervade every human character, but which in her no tender partiality on my part either palliated or concealed. Lady Elizabeth's errors, though not of a more unamiable nature than thoſe of moſt women of her rank who have received a ſimilar education, where particularly

ill

ill ſuited to my diſpoſition, and to thoſe views of domeſtic felicity to which, even in my moſt diſſipated moments, my wiſhes have invariably pointed; and ſoon ſuſpicious of my grandfather's views, which muſt have utterly deſtroyed all my future proſpects of happineſs, and which I found every individual of the family ſo anxiouſly deſired, ſince my laſt return from the Continent, I have uniformly endeavoured by the moſt reſpectful diſtance to demonſtrate that I did not preſume to regard myſelf as entitled to offer my addreſſes to one of the firſt heireſſes in England.

Some weeks ago, however, I received a letter from Lord Belmont, in plain terms propoſing the match to my conſideration, and repreſenting it to me in all thoſe glowing colours which a favourite plan ever receives from the pen of the contrivers. My mother too, who had often before hinted to me her wiſhes on the ſame ſubject, and to whom my Lord had written at the ſame time, uſed all her rhetoric to point out the ſplendid advantages that muſt reſult from this union.

Ah! why, my Lord, cried I interrupting him—why then have you ſolicited my conſent to an application, which if ſuch are Lord Belmont's views, never can prove ſucceſsful?

Deareſt Miſs Seymour, cried he warmly, how can you form a concluſion ſo alarming and ſo perfectly unjuſt, merely from a ſimple explanation which you force me to give you? If you will only liſten to me, you will find theſe apprehenſions quite imaginary, and wholly void of foundation. Had fate indeed placed you in that ſituation, in which till ſo lately I beheld you doomed to remain, unconnected and un-

known, obſcure in rank, and diſtinguiſhed only by your elegance, your merit, and accompliſhments; in this caſe, though you muſt ever have continued the firſt and deareſt object of my affections, yet my friends I allow might have objected; and the certainty that Lord Belmont's approbation was not to be hoped for where no circumſtances of birth or fortune preſented themſelves, has not only tortured my boſom ever ſince the moment in which I was favoured with your acquaintance, but has been the origin of all that inconſiſtency of conduct which muſt have often perplexed and even ſometimes perhaps offended you. Determined at one moment to conquer an attachment that I knew muſt involve me in all the difficulties of diſunion with my family, I ſedulouſly avoided you with fortitude and forbearance; conſcious the next of my utter inability to ſtruggle againſt a paſſion which inſinuated itſelf into my heart beyond all power of reſiſtance, I ſought with avidity what I had before ſhunned with apprehenſion, and gave myſelf wholly up to the delightful illuſions of hope and tenderneſs. Such being the fluctuating ſtate of my mind for many months paſt, what was the relief, the exultation I experienced, on the diſcovery I made at Hubert Hill! The knowledge of your real rank and ſituation at once relieved me from all the miſery of this continual conteſt between inclination and principle. My whole ſoul was in a tumult of joy. Lord Belmont's approbation I conſidered as ſecured; and from that inſtant eagerly watched an opportunity for pouring out at your feet the feelings with which it was overwhelmed. When there, too, I found the ſympathetic ſoftneſs of my Hermione——.

Oh

Oh ſtop! for heaven's ſake! cried I, interrupting him impatiently. Would to God you had never found the moment you deſired. I foreſee a world of trouble and miſery from my unpardonable folly and weakneſs. Oh! what on earth could make me ſo unguarded! Lord Belmont, inflexible in his determinations and prepoſſeſſions, never will be induced to relinquiſh his hopes of an alliance on which his views have ſo long and ſo invariably reſted, and muſt receive with augmented prejudice and unconquerable repugnance, the grandchild who ſo unpropitiouſly appears to interrupt his ſchemes and diſappoint his wiſhes. Of this, my Lord, you muſt yourſelf be convinced, even while you labour to perſuade me of the contrary.

Shocked at the alarming proſpect which preſented itſelf ſo forcibly to my apprehenſion that I could not conceal my fears, my Lord exerted himſelf powerfully and ſucceſsfully to diſpel the notion of my grandfather's inflexibility; and I ſoon began to forget the idea that had given me ſo much pain. He repreſented to me that it was extremely unnatural and improbable to ſuppoſe, that his Lordſhip, when ſatisfied as to the propriety and decorum of our paſt conduct, would receive, otherwiſe than with open arms and delighted ſatisfaction, children who ſeemed ſent as from heaven for the comfort and ſupport of his old age. That his Lordſhip had hitherto rejected and diſowned us, could merely be attributed, he ſaid, to ſome miſtaken prejudice which muſt have found its way to his mind even on the Continent. To ſuſpect him now of an obſtinacy ſo hardened, without any apparent motive except the cruelty and injuſtice of his nature, was to accuſe him of a ſavage

diſpoſition extremely oppoſite to his benevolent temper, and indeed almoſt below human nature itſelf.

I longed extremely to aſk him if Lady Linrole was yet acquainted with the declaration he had made to me; and if ſo, in what manner ſhe had received it; but the entrance of Lady Aubrey, who however did not appear till long after her uſual hour, interrupted all further private converſation between us.

She received his Lordſhip with the moſt inſinuating kindneſs, and with that flattering eaſe which ſo agreeably diſcards the cold ceremony of a firſt interview. Immediately after breakfaſt, during which Lady Aubrey entertained her gueſt with the polite freedom due to an eſteemed and long known friend, his Lordſhip told us he was conſtrained to ſet off without further delay. I muſt make up for this indulgence, ſaid he, by travelling with the utmoſt expedition; yet with all the celerity I can effect, I think my Lord Belmont will have to wait my arrival at Calais; for as I did not apprehend the diſappointment of finding you abſent, I made no proviſion for the laſt day I ſpent on the road.

He then took leave, reccommending, in a low voice, but with a look which teſtified how ſanguine were his expectations, the ſucceſs of this important journey to my beſt wiſhes; and Lady Aubrey, who overheard him, told him with an expreſſive ſmile that her prayers attended his expedition.

After he was gone, ſhe expreſſed her admiration of him in terms ſo ſtrong as to gratify me beyond meaſure. His figure, ſhe ſaid, ſeemed formed to captivate, and the pleaſing intelligence

gence of his countenance demonſtrated that nature had not reſted his merit ſolely on external ſuperiority. She was enchanted with his addreſs. From what I have heard of him, ſaid ſhe, with infinite kindneſs, and from what I have ſeen, I am convinced that he is not unworthy of my dear child.

I can hardly believe, Sophia, that four and twenty hours have effected ſuch a revolution in my mind. My proſpects have undergone ſo great a change, that I almoſt imagine I am in a dream. I am indeed in Fairy Land, and all things ſmile around me. To find myſelf the object of Lord Linroſe's fondeſt partiality, to know that the moſt material obſtacles to our mutual happineſs never exiſted but in my own apprehenſions, and to perceive a probable ray of hope of ſoon finding myſelf ſurrounded by friends and relations, diſpoſed to love, and willing to be beloved by me——oh! Sophia! what a bleſſed reverſe from our late friendleſs, ſolitary ſtate!

I have juſt had a note from Fanny, intimating that ſhe and Mr. Howard (having got all his matters adjuſted) will be with us on Thurſday.

Adieu, my beloved Sophia. I think with delight on the pleaſure the peruſal of this packet will give to your warm ſympathetic heart.

H. SEYMOUR.

LETTER XXIV.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

JULY 18.

MY ſiſter and Mr. Howard arrived yeſterday. I walked out in hopes of meeting their carriage; but they had taken another road, and had ſat half an hour with Lady Aubrey before I returned to the houſe.

This interval ſhe had employed in explaining to them the preſent poſture of affairs. Mr. Howard was overjoyed, but leſs aſtoniſhed than Lady Aubrey expected; for he had long been conſcious, he told her, that a mutual attachment ſubſiſted between Lord Linroſe and me; and however unaccountable his Lordſhip's conduct had ſometimes appeared, and however well authenticated the report of his marriage had been, he had ever ſuſpected the validity of its foundation, and foreſeen what in that caſe the iſſue would prove.

Fanny was quite intoxicated with joy. She kiſſed Lady Aubrey again and again for having communicated ſuch good news, and when I entered the room, I was obliged to entreat her by a look not inſtantly to bring on the ſubject. But my caution was quite unneceſſary. She ſeemed ready to dance from *gaietè de cœur*; and at length unable to contain herſelf longer—Mr. Howard, cried ſhe, you muſt ſalute Lady Linroſe

roſe once more, and wiſh her Ladyſhip joy. It is extremely rude to be ſo inattentive on the preſent joyful occaſion.

It may rather be called unkind perhaps, ſaid Mr. Howard, (ſmiling, while he obeyed her commands) but I have long wiſhed our dear ſiſter from the bottom of my heart the enjoyment of that happineſs which I was convinced would one day prove her fate.

Our Hermione has many rivals, ſaid Lady Aubrey. Mrs. Howard, I perceive, is quite enthuſiaſtic about my Lord; and as for myſelf, though I had his picture faithfully delineated by the moſt able hand before I beheld him, yet I was quite charmed as well with his appearance as with the ſuperior elegance of his manners and converſation.

Our little party laſt night was in uncommon ſpirits, and Fanny quite giddy with mirth. We talked over and over every fancied circumſtance of the meeting which muſt have by this time taken place between the travellers, with an intereſt that ſeemed equally to animate the whole party, yet I always feel uneaſy on repeating before Lady Aubrey the name of Lord Belmont, often as it has within theſe few days occurred in the courſe of converſation. She ſpoke of him this night herſelf however with an apparent tranquillity that partly relieved me; and when I attended her as uſual to her dreſſing room after ſupper, ſhe owned to me, that though the proſpect of ſeeing him agitated her not a little, ſhe felt for him the tender regard of a daughter, and thought of an interview with a ſenſation of mournful ſatisfaction that ſoothed and gratified her. He always demonſtrated a peculiar fondneſs for me, ſaid ſhe, which

which excited my warmeſt gratitude; and tho' an ill founded reſentment on my father's part obliged me during his life time wholly to break off all intercourſe with the whole family, and after the misfortune of his death I had not courage to think of demanding a viſit from the kind old man before I left England, my wounds being then too recent, and my feelings unſubdued by time and patience, yet I always remember him with tenderneſs; and I flatter myſelf, after the firſt meeting is over, I ſhall derive much ſatisfaction from a re-union which I have always ſo anxiouſly deſired. To enlarge the objects of our intereſt, is in fact to augment the ſcale of our happineſs; and I ſhall never allow myſelf to ſigh too bitterly for paſt ſorrows, while the preſent affords me friends that excite my warmeſt ſenſibility.

JULY 21.

I have impatiently expected letters from Calais theſe two days paſt; Lord Linroſe having promiſed to write the moment he had ſeen Lord Belmont; but none have arrived; which I own both diſappoints and ſurpriſes me.

JULY 23.

No letters ſtill. By this time, if no interruption has retarded their journey, Lord Belmont

mont and his grandſon might have been arrived in town in their way to Belmont, which is in ——ſhire. But I imagine his Lordſhip has not travelled with ſuch expedition as he propoſed; and probably Lord Linroſe did not get up with him ſo ſoon as was intended. Lord Belmont's health, though much improved by a ſalutary climate, is but lately re-eſtabliſhed; and I fear the ſhock of his ſon's death may have occaſioned a relapſe. The weather has been ſo ſerene, that apprehenſion on the ſcore of their paſſage would be ridiculous, yet I cannot avoid being uneaſy.

JULY 24.

Lady Aubrey, whoſe aſtoniſhment at the ſilence of Lord Linroſe, fully equalled mine, ſent her ſervant yeſterday evening to wait the arrival of the poſt; and while ſhe, Mr. Howard, and my ſiſter, were ſat down to *ombre*, my anxiety and impatience led me to ſteal away to meet the returning meſſenger. I had ſtrolled towards the great road at the extremity of the park, which is near a mile from the houſe, before I ſaw him; and having haſtily looked over the letters, perceived with redoubled regret that none were either directed for me, or written by the hand of Lord Linroſe.

Diſappointed and perplexed, I bade the man go forwards; and returning ſlowly, was ruminating moſt uncomfortably on the unaccountable cauſe of this diſappointment, when I heard the trampling of horſes behind me; and turn-

ing round, perceived Lord Linroſe on horſe-back, attended by his ſervant. I had now got almoſt within ſight of the houſe. He rode quietly up to me; and inſtantly diſmounting, gave his horſe to his ſervant, and approached me with a mixture of pleaſure and uneaſineſs in his countenance, that inſtantly told me ſomething diſagreeable was to follow. He took my hand, and tenderly congratulated me on my improved looks ſince he had laſt ſeen me. But the ſolemnity with which he ſpoke alarmed me; and I imagined he had not courage to proceed.

I am afraid, my Lord, ſaid I at length with a forced ſmile, things have not turned out happily. Lord Belmont I perceive will not acknowledge his grand-children.

Oh! he is determined and immoveable, cried he. He is deaf to my entreaties, and wholly inſenſible to the voice of nature, to compaſſion, to humanity, or even to that cool diſpaſſioned reaſon which he recommends to me perpetually as the only ſafe and rational rule of conduct. I have attempted every human method of prevailing, I have exhauſted every poſſible argument of perſuaſion, and ſaid all that man can ſay where his laſt and deareſt hopes are at ſtake: but oh! he is impenetrable! neither to be ſoftened into pity, nor influenced by juſtice; and he declares himſelf deliberately reſolved on no account whatever, either privately to ſee, or publicly to acknowledge his grand-children. He has even forcibly and abſolutely proteſted—

That we never more muſt meet, ſaid I ſteadily, while he heſitated to proceed. Well, my Lord, if

if ſuch is his reſolution, it is your Lordſhip's duty, as well as mine implicitly to ſubmit.

Submit! exclaimed he with warmth, throwing himſelf paſſionately at my feet. Oh! never, never will I ſubmit to a deciſion ſo barbarous, unreaſonable, and inhuman. Lord Belmont undoubtedly has a right within certain bounds to preſcribe to me *my* conduct, but *I* on my part poſſeſs one equally potent to expect from his juſtice reaſon and moderation. Wherever in thoſe points he fails, ſo far he cancels the mutual bonds of obligation and duty that exiſt between us, and ſets me free to act for myſelf. Had he prohibited a connection which could not have been conſidered as diſhonourable, but merely as mortifying to his views, and degrading to his dignity, even in this caſe had my heart been torn to death I ſcarce think I could have gratified my own wiſhes at the expence of torturing him with the diſappointment of hopes, which however blindly, have invariably ſought my happineſs as their ultimate foundation; and I think, Miſs Seymour, a ſhort review of my paſt conduct may convince you of the truth of this aſſertion; but when, without the ſlighteſt grounds of diſapprobation, he objects, when he forbids an alliance where every gratification of reaſon and even of vanity preſent themſelves; when fortune has made you at leaſt my equal, and nature created you ah! how infinitely my ſuperior, theſe obligations of duty end; Lord Belmont muſt thank himſelf for the ſtep he obliges us to take; and we are no longer bound to gratify that caprice which rigorouſly demands the ſacrifice of our whole happineſs.

Ah! my Lord, cried I ſorrowfully, all this is mere ſophiſtry. The real ſtate of the matter

is

is quite different. Lord Belmont rejects me as his grandchild either by blood or alliance; and never, never will I be prevailed with to grant an independent conſent, though my grandfather's behaviour towards me may in your Lordſhip's opinion ſet us free from theſe obligations of duty which otherwiſe he muſt undoubtedly claim; yet ſurely you cannot be ignorant of, or inſenſible to the powerful motives that reſtrain me. How many painful minutes has the diſobedience of his children occaſioned to Lord Belmont! Diſappointed in his ſanguine expectations of their happineſs, diſtracted with the conduct of one ſon, and diſpleaſed, however unjuſtly, with the connection formed by the other, he now finds himſelf deprived for ever of both, and ſeeks in his grandſon the completion of thoſe expectations which have hitherto proved only a ſource of vexation, uneaſineſs, and mortification to his boſom. Oh! my Lord! ought we to render this unfortunate old man ſtill more miſerable? Ought we to blaſt his laſt hopes, and teach him that while he had the generoſity to place his happineſs in the proſperity of his children, however blindly he judged of the means, diſappointment, and ingratitude were all the return they afforded him?

Ah! Miſs Seymour! in what a light you place Lord Belmont's conduct! But pray liſten, I entreat you, with equal patience and attention, to a fair and candid examination of the matter from me. Let not a romantic generoſity warp your judgment, and baniſh your compaſſion where it ought more naturally to exert itſelf. Great, I allow, would be the weight of your arguments, were Lord Belmont's miſery the natural conſequence of our happineſs; but

but this is ſo far from being the real cauſe, that the moſt certain comfort, and moſt aſſured ſatisfaction muſt flow from his being a witneſs of our mutual felicity, where no one obſtacle, but thoſe of caprice and prepoſſeſſion are alledged. How is it to be reaſonably ſuppoſed they will reſt on his mind, when all hope of another alliance, which at preſent ſupports his inflexibility, is wholly and for ever ſuppreſt? No; be aſſured my grandfather's eyes will then be opened to his error; and with the moſt ſincere regret he will abjure his own, and pardon our's, and taking my Hermione to his boſom, will experience in her duty and affection, and in the enjoyment he muſt derive from my unſpeakable felicity, all the comfort, happineſs, and delight, of which, by a falſe generoſity and ill judged adherence to the rigours of duty, you would wholly deprive him in his old days.

Ah! my Lord! cried I, ſoftened at this ſoothing repreſentation, and terrified at my own weakneſs, I have liſtened too long. I can hear no more. It grows late. I haſtened on; but Lord Linroſe perſiſted in detaining me, and ſeizing my hand, implored me for the ſake of Heaven, to think on what he had urged.

No, cried I, I muſt think of it no more. But tell me, what ſaid Lord Belmont? of what did he accuſe us? what excuſe did he offer for this cruel prepoſſeſſion?

None. When I entered on the ſubject, I found him thoroughly well informed, and to all appearance even prepared for my application. Linroſe, ſaid he, I know what you are going to propoſe: but let me ſave you the fatigue of intreaties that are fruitleſs, and the pain of hopes that muſt be ſucceeded by diſappointment.

The

The young women for whom you interceed, be aſſured I never will acknowledge. I have my own reaſons for this conduct—reaſons which, accountable to none, ſhall die in my own breaſt. But hear my final determination on this head: if you trifle with my reſentment, and dare form a connexion ſo repugnant to my wiſhes, I ſolemnly declare————But why ſhould I repeat to you a denunciation evidently the conſequence of ſome ſecret prepoſſeſſion, foſtered heaven knows how, but which is rooted ſo deeply in his mind, that ſome inhuman, officious hand I am convinced ſtill ſupports the prejudice it has originally implanted.

What ſecret enemy has done us an injury ſo irreparable I have not been able to diſcover. My Lord would not even hear me on the ſubject; and when I ſeriouſly inſiſted, that as your only ſurviving parent he was bound in honour to afford you his countenance and protection, or to ſatisfy you and the world why both were withheld, he told me with an indignant ſmile that his motives would exculpate his conduct both to the world and to his own heart. I perceived, I replied, that he laboured under the injurious miſtake which had for ſome time, owing to a variety of circumſtances that a few moments could explain, prevailed to your diſadvantage, and inſtantly entered on the ſeveral points that had ſo unfortunately led to this idea.

He liſtened in contemptuous ſilence. I am perfectly ſatisfied, ſaid he ironically, as to the conduct of the young ladies. I accuſe them of nothing: but I abſolutely deſire that I may hear nothing further on a ſubject that fatigues me, and which entirely embitters the enjoy-

ment

ment I had vainly flattered myſelf this meeting would have given me.

This converſation took place during the evening on which we met at Calais; and next day, while we travelled from Dover to town, I renewed the ſubject, and endeavoured to work on his Lordſhip's feeling, finding all attempts to convince his reaſon unſucceſsful. An accident however occurred, which all the malice of ill fortune could not have introduced at a more unlucky moment. We encountered Lord Mortonbury at the ſtage where we dined, and he eaſily perſuaded my Lord to ſpend a few days at his country ſeat, which lies in our way to Belmont. A rencontre ſo ill fated could ſcarce have happened. The ſight of his old friend could not fail to ſtrengthen and augment his Lordſhip's obduracy, and confirm his determination in favour of an alliance that has ſo long been his favourite wiſh. For ſome time therefore I carefully avoided exciting his reſentment by touching on a topic, which I perceived, from ſome diſagreeable hints he occaſionally let fall, would now be liſtened to with leſs temper than ever.

In this ſtate, to write to you was impoſſible. I could tell you nothing but what I wiſhed eternally to forget, and I could only have made you a ſharer in the uneaſineſs that weighed down my own ſpirits. Teazed and worn out, I could no longer ſupport with patience the miſerable uncertainty of my ſituation, and at length ventured to riſk a renewal of this topic of contention. I began by imprudently aſſuring his Lordſhip that my reſolutions in regard to Lady Elizabeth were fixed and unalterable. My ill judged warmth provoked and exaſperated him; and

and I found, that inſtead of gaining ground, my arguments were received with augmented diſpleaſure, and if poſſible with more determined repugnance than before.

Convinced that all hopes of prevailing were at an end, I then determined to contrive an eſcape for one day, which the pretext of viſiting a friend who reſides in this country eaſily afforded me; and to endeavour if poſſible to reconcile you to a ſtep, which, however alarming on the firſt view, be aſſured, lovelieſt Hermione, preſents no real danger. You determine before you have fairly weighed and conſidered the circumſtances of the caſe. You are ſcared with the notion of diſobedience, ere you reflect that from you Lord Belmont claims no duty; and the idea of a private marriage ſhocks you as an indelicacy and terrifies you as daring, merely becauſe you have been accuſtomed to regard it in that light, without reflecting on the ſingularity of your ſituation, and the ſatisfaction which muſt reſult even to Lord Belmont from this temporary diſappointment. We leave Morton Hall to-morrow evening; at which place I muſt by that time be, in order to accompany my grandfather to Belmont, where he has ſome buſineſs to ſettle previous to a viſit he means to pay my mother in Northamptonſhire. But oh! Miſs Seymour, with what alacrity, with what delight ſhall I return to him, if you will but raiſe me from this ſtate of deſpair, if you will but animate me to life and hope, and generouſly promiſe to be mine, without an approbation that is not to be obtained!

We had now reached the houſe, and it began to be very late. Stay but for an inſtant, cried he,

he, and relieve me from this agony of uncertainty.

No, no, cried I, pulling away my hand, I muſt liſten no longer, I muſt hear no more; and entering the hall, I ran up to my own apartment in ſpite of all his efforts to detain me.

Oh! Sophia! I carried thither all the inſinuating arguments to which I had been attending with ſo much irreſolution; and I found, that while my judgment remained unconvinced, and my delicacy revolted at the idea of a clandeſtine connexion, ſo contrary to that open dignity of conduct which I had flattered myſelf with the hope of ſupporting invariably thro' life, my heart died within me at the cruel ſacrifice I made to principle. Even ſelf applauſe ſuſtained not my ſpirits. Pride was ſubdued by ſoftneſs; and I found that one moment longer would have given to Lord Linroſe all he wiſhed.

Involved in this miſt of paſſion, I yet began at length to perceive how providential was that eſcape which at firſt I had almoſt regretted; and I conſidered, with a thankfulneſs that half bordered on ſatisfaction, what mortification muſt have ever attended the recollection of a ſtep which I could not but have conſidered as derogatory to the character I have ever wiſhed and endeavoured to maintain.

This idea ſomewhat conſoled me; and reſolving to ſtruggle with feelings which I could not in private indulge without in a great meaſure betraying them to Lord Linroſe, and rendering them obvious to the reſt of the family, I forced myſelf into ſeeming compoſure, and went down ſtairs.

Lady

Lady Aubrey and my ſiſter were together. Mr. Howard, I found, had been ſent for to another room to Lord Linroſe, of whoſe arrival they were yet ignorant. I had the diſagreeable taſk therefore of diſcloſing to them the ſcene that had juſt taken place. Poor Fanny's chagrin kept pace with her late exultation, and Lady Aubrey's countenance was clouded with the moſt friendly diſappointment.

Who can be ſuch a fiend, cried Fanny, as to perſecute us in this cruel manner without the ſlighteſt provocation? who upon the face of the earth can find either intereſt or pleaſure in blaſting our reputations, and perſuading Lord Belmont that we are unworthy of his regard? and who could poſſibly have dreamt that he would have proved thus obſtinate and determined, when all the reſt of the family are now our friends; when even Lady Linroſe herſelf profeſſes to love us, and wiſhes to ſee us reinſtated in his favour?

So her Ladyſhip is pleaſed to ſay, cried I; but from what Lord Linroſe let fall this evening, I think there is great reaſon to ſuſpect that her wiſhes have a very contrary direction. From her repreſentation only can Lord Belmont have imbibed the prepoſſeſſions that retain ſuch faſt hold on his mind, ſince from no other perſon could he poſſibly have received intelligence concerning us.

I ſhould be ſorry, ſaid Lady Aubrey, to accuſe Lady Linroſe, or to ſuſpect her of a conduct below her character; but I own I have had my doubts of her on this occaſion from the beginning. Her motives, tho' mean and deſpicable, are ſufficiently obvious, and I have been told by my aunt, Lady Meredith, that ſhe

is

is a woman of a very unamiable character and generally diſliked.

The entrance of Lord Linroſe and Mr. Howard prevented her proceeding. The former was viſibly depreſſed; and appeared to exert himſelf to converſe upon the indifferent topics which enſued, but which were very languidly diſcuſſed by the company during the whole evening.

Supper was ſoon after announced; and being ſeated by him at table, he intreated me in a low voice to give him an opportunity for one half hour's converſation before he left us, which muſt be early in the morning.

I told him ſteadily that he muſt not expect me to liſten to a repetition of arguments, which without Lord Belmont's ſanction could lead to nothing, If any favourable moment occurs, ſaid I, in which you can flatter yourſelf with the hope of ſetting your plans in ſuch a point of view as will obtain my Lord's approbation, I believe your Lordſhip hardly doubts of mine. But why ſhould you even wiſh to ſoften me into a compliance which, wanting the concurrence of my reaſon, and wholly oppoſite to my ideas of propriety, would but lower me in my own eſtimation, and render me too unhappy to enable me to——

I was afraid of my voice, and ventured not to proceed. Lord Linroſe preſt my hand unobſerved, and whiſpered a thouſand expreſſions of gratitude and acquieſcence. At leaſt, ſaid he, I promiſe to acquieſce till every poſſible ſource of trial has been attempted in vain. In the mean time, you cannot ſurely have the barbarity to refuſe allowing me to correſpond with you. To this requeſt I can take no denial.

I agreed

I agreed for the preſent to the propoſal, becauſe I could not prevail with myſelf to refuſe *all* he aſked; but I am much afraid even this is an indulgence that muſt ſoon be relinquiſhed.

When we ſeparated for the night, Lady Aubrey remained ſome time behind in converſation with my Lord and Mr. Howard. His Lordſhip uſed every argument to prevail with them to approve of an immediate marriage; and mentioned the fortune he inherited from Sir Thomas Roatſley, which ſecured him a competency; all, he was certain, for which I would be ſolicitous till a reconciliation with Lord Belmont took place. But Lady Aubrey told him, that tho', had ſuch been the reſult of my deliberations, ſhe ſhould not have oppoſed a meaſure which undoubtedly, from the peculiarity of our ſituation, afforded ſome excuſe, yet ſhe would not adviſe what ſhe could not approve, and on the contrary muſt ever admire the ſteadineſs of my reſolution, which having its foundation in delicacy and principle, whatever was the anguiſh it occaſioned me, ſhe was convinced I would ſtrictly adhere to.

Ah! my dear Madam! cried I, penetrated with ſhame while ſhe repeated to me this part of their converſation, ſteadily will I adhere to this reſolution, ſince it is ſanctioned with your applauſe. But much anguiſh has it occaſioned to my heart, and much I fear your opinion of my heroiſm would be infinitely diminiſhed, did you know how near I was incurring your contempt by yielding to my Lord's wiſhes.

My contempt, my deareſt Hermione? Be aſſured that is a ſentiment my heart never can feel for you. Had you given way to the ſolicitations of your lover, believe me I ſhould have ſoothed

and

and comforted inſtead of condemning you. I wiſh you to aſſume the heroine to Lord Linroſe; but I am far from either deſiring or expecting you to appear one to me. On the contrary, I think I ſhould love you leſs were you different in any point from what I find you.

Oh! Sophia! ought not the affection of this beloved friend to conſole me for every diſappointment?

JULY 30.

I received this day the following letter from Lord Linroſe.

TO MISS SEYMOUR.

How ſhall I ſummon reſolution to acknowledge to the loveliеſt of women, that my ſole hope of becoming the happieſt and moſt envied of men, reſts on a plan, the mention of which I tremble to remember ſhocked and ſtartled her ſo ſeverely. Lord Belmont, I am unwillingly conſtrained to own, is more determined, more infatuated if poſſible than ever; and without dwelling on ungrateful particulars, I am forced to tell you, that of any alteration in his preſent ſentiments I dare no longer entertain the ſlighteſt hope.

But is it the neceſſary conſequence of Lord Belmont's inflexibility, that I muſt be doomed to unmitigated miſery, and you be rendered unhappy?

happy? And why ought we to prove a ſacrifice to caprice, where not one reaſonable obſtacle obſtructs our union? no duty ſurely is owing to that parent who denies the title and diſowns all claim to obedience. Yet if you will perſiſt in regarding him in that ſacred light, give him, I intreat, the moſt lively proof of your affection: oblige him in his own deſpite. Make me the happieſt of mankind; and gratify the firſt wiſh of the old man's heart, by allowing him to witneſs the unſpeakable felicity which you and you only can confer upon his grandſon.

In regard to fortune, I am convinced you are by no means apprehenſive. Mine, independent of my grandfather, were Hermione to ſhare it with me, would ſurpaſs my own wiſhes, and I am convinced ſatisfy hers. The motive of her reſiſtance, I am certain, is too generous to allow for a moment of ſuch conſiderations. She trembles to wound a heart that has ſo long and ſo ſeverely bled; but be aſſured you will heal inſtead of augment his ſorrows—you will ſooth inſtead of torture his boſom, you will conſole him for all he has ſuffered, and a momentary diſappointment will be ſucceeded by unceaſing conſolation.

I have more than once ſounded my Lord as to the ſecret author of this prepoſſeſſion, which, without the aſſiſtance of ſome intermeddling ſlanderous tongue, never could have found its way into his mind; but on this ſubject his caution baffles all my penetration. I even began moſt unjuſtly to accuſe my mother, as the only perſon on whom I could contrive to reſt my ſuſpicions with any ſhadow of probability; but I now heartily repent the injurious idea which induced me to write her upon the ſubject

ject with much acrimony, for my heart was too much tortured either to expreſs myſelf with calmneſs or to think with reaſon. She had the goodneſs however to pardon my impetuoſity; and condeſcended to account for her behaviour in a manner that made me bluſh for my own.

Revolve, lovely Hermione, for the ſake of heaven revolve, I entreat, on all I have ſaid. We are ſtill at Morton Hall; my grandfather having been confined with a ſlight fit of the gout, which will probably detain him ſome days longer. Conſider the reaſon, the juſtice, the perfect propriety, nay the duty and humanity of the ſcheme I propoſe, and favour me with one propitious line, to alleviate the diſtreſs of your eternally grateful and obedient ſervant,

LINROSE.

JULY 28.

The peruſal of this letter has indeed plunged me into a ſea of troubles; and on the firſt reading, I thought only of acceding to Lord Linroſe's propoſal. I conſidered nothing but the ſad alternative, either of hazarding every inconvenience and yielding at once to his entreaties, or of relinquiſhing him for ever. I forgot the repugnance of my own heart to a meaſure ſo bold and ſo dangerous, and which recurred with painful force the inſtant the perturbation of my mind began to abate. I remembered not the applauſe which had in my cool moments attended my former refuſal, nor the conſolation which I had derived from that of my dear and ever reſpected Lady Aubrey, whoſe approbation of my conduct is eſſential to my peace. I conſidered not the peculiar ſituation of Lord Linroſe;

roſe; whoſe rank in the world, and habits of living muſt, with the beſt diſpoſition in the world, render him particularly unfit for the circumſcribed œconomy and ſecluſion of which his own independent fortune would admit. Mr. Howard tells me it does not exceed five or ſix hundred a year; and to this limited income, which I make no doubt has hardly hitherto ſerved for the little incidental charges of pocket money, Lord Linroſe would be forced to ſubmit probably during the life time of Lord Belmont, for as to the hopes of ſoftening him into forgiveneſs, even Lady Aubrey, it is eaſy to perceive, builds little on that circumſtance.

Stern and unrelenting when once thoroughly exaſperated, it is infinitely more probable, ſhe ſays, that ſubmiſſion and time may ſoften him in our favour than that he ſhould ever be prevailed with to pardon an act of open defiance. The very idea that Lord Linroſe, from now conſidering himſelf as the ſole and natural heir of his title and wealth, may with leſs apprehenſion dare to brave his diſpleaſure, is a circumſtance the moſt likely to induce him to let his grandſon feel the whole weight of his indignation in every way he can deviſe, and as long as he lives to puniſh his diſobedience.

Some of the moſt prudent of theſe conſiderations you will ſuſpect, Sophia, were not wholly the ſuggeſtions of my own mind. At leaſt at firſt, though my reaſon could not but entirely acquieſce with the force, juſtice, and probability of all thoſe concluſions, the moment they either occurred to myſelf or were ſuggeſted to me by the apprehenſive tenderneſs of my dear Lady Aubrey, that difficulty which had impreſſed me with the leaſt alarm became, from her prudent repreſentation, the motive that weighed the

the moſt forcibly againſt my compliance. The idea of involving Lord Linroſe perhaps for a period of years, (for Lord Belmont, though advanced in life, may ſurvive a long time) in all the inconveniencies of a narrow fortune, for which he muſt be ſo peculiarly ill calculated, is a meaſure I find I could not ſummon reſolution to hazard.

I have therefore written to him. I have deſired him to think of me no more till his propoſals are authorized by Lord Belmont's conſent. But I believe I have not been able to conceal the poignant regret with which I make the ſacrifice; and indeed if it will ſerve to ſoften his diſappointment, I wiſh not to deny how deeply I partake in the ſufferings I am conſtrained to inflict.

AUGUST 1.

With what infinite tenderneſs and ſympathy Lady Aubrey enters into all my feelings on this occaſion! She ſooths my uneaſineſs, with a pity that draws my confidence and claims my warmeſt gratitude. I no longer conceal from her the regret I experience in giving pain to Lord Linroſe, and diſappointing his hopes. I even confeſs it to her with an eaſe that lulls my diſtreſs and fortifies my mind.

My ſiſter's gaiety has quite deſerted her, ſince this ſad reverſe took place. Mr. Howard too muſt naturally experience ſome perſonal diſappointment. The advantages reſulting

from a reconciliation with Lord Belmont are of no trifling importance to the intereſts of an encreaſing family. But I doubt if Fanny carries her ideas ſo far. Her mortification is merely excited by her ſeelings for mine, and that regret which it is natural to ſuffer on being forced finally to relinquiſh a favourite proſpect that has been long and fondly cheriſhed.

AUGUST 2.

I exert myſelf to appear chearful, tho' the means by which I ſupport my ſeeming heroiſm but prepares me perhaps for freſh uneaſineſs. I cannot help ſecretly flattering myſelf that if an interview were by any means to take place between Lady Aubrey and Lord Belmont, ſhe might with ſome probability of ſucceſs undertake our defence, and extirpate thoſe deep-rooted prejudices that have been productive of conſequences ſo unhappy. Such a propoſal, however, it is impoſſible for me to ſuggeſt; particularly as ſhe now never mentions any intention of ſoliciting a renewal of Lord Belmont's acquaintance, and ſeems to have merely regarded that meaſure as the neceſſary reſult of the connection between them which my marriage muſt have produced. This I own ſurpriſes me; but I ſuppoſe her courage having failed her as the moment ſeemed approaching, ſhe hardly regrets a ſatisfaction which muſt have been purchaſed at the price of ſo much agitation and apprehenſion.

I think

I think continually in what manner and with what ſenſations Lord Linroſe has received my letter. I ſuppoſe I ſhall have his anſwer to-morrow or next day. I ſincerely hope he will reſign himſelf to my determination without any further ſolicitations. I tremble leſt he ſhould take the reſolution of coming again hither.

This evening's poſt brought me my dear, dear Sophia's delightful packet, which has given me more pleaſure than I thought it poſſible I could have taſted in the preſent ſtate of my ſpirits. Oh what infinite comfort does the hopes, however diſtant, of one day embracing you infuſe into my heart! I think I ought not to complain of any calamity when heaven promiſes me a conſolation ſo powerful towards ſoothing every painful regret. This idea not only heals my uneaſineſs, but inſpires me with reſolution to ſtruggle againſt it. I am infinitely more reſigned ſince your letter arrived. Two others accompanied it, which I ſhould hardly have thought of mentioning did not one of them contain a piece of intelligence at which I cannot but feel ſincere pleaſure: it is from Miſs Parſons, who informs me that ſhe is in a few weeks to give her hand to a gentleman who has lately paid her his addreſſes: he is a clergyman, a middle aged man, ſhe tells me, poſſeſſed of an excellent character, and a good living. My ſiſter and I are much pleaſed to find that a ſetplement ſo fortunate and ſo comfortable at laſt puts a final period to poor Miſs Jenny's mortifications and difficulties; for by ſome hints in her letter I ſuſpect that her ſituation in Lady Linroſe's family was by no means ſo comfortable as ſhe at firſt expected. There is a paragraph towards the end tha ſtrongly corrobo-

rates our ſuſpicions of that lady's duplicity. It is as follows.

"I ſuppoſe you are not ignorant that Lord Belmont is returned to England. Heaven grant that you and your amiable ſiſter may derive the ſatisfaction from that event that my heart wiſhes you. He is moſt impatiently expected here by her Ladyſhip, whoſe anxiety to ſee him would have carried her to meet him in town had he not prevented her by ſpending ſome time with my Lord Mortonbury. I fear much, my dear Miſs Seymour, that you entruſted not your cauſe to an unprejudiced advocate when you expected Lady Linroſe would mediate in your favour with his Lordſhip. I have never preſumed to repeat even your names in her preſence till the other morning, when a gentleman of this neighbourhood, who ſaw you in town, happening in the courſe of converſation to mention the ſuperior elegance of your appearance with many juſt encomiums, her Ladyſhip ſpoke of you with an indignant diſreſpect that aſtoniſhed and ſhocked me. I could no longer attend in ſilence to ſo much injuſtice, and defended you with a warmth that ended in a rupture between us. My approaching marriage, however, renders this a circumſtance wholly immaterial, as my dear little charge is my only regret on quitting the family; and I am at preſent at the houſe of a friend, where I ſhall remain till I remove to that of Mr. Price."

This intelligence does not ſurpriſe me; neither, ſince it proves no material inconvenience to Miſs Parſons, does the diſcovery diſpleaſe me: for the diſguſt which has been implanted by miſrepreſentation and jealouſy is infinitely leſs formidable than that which might have

have been the reſult of inherent obſtinacy and caprice.

The other epiſtle is from Mrs. Hindon, who is returned from her expedition to Holland.

AUGUST 3.

Read, my beloved Sophia, read and participate in the happy revolution which this day, this propitious day has produced. I ſhall endeavour to inform you of the particulars with all the compoſure I can ſummon to my aid.

My ſiſter having been yeſterday a little indiſpoſed, Lady Aubrey propoſed taking her for an airing this morning immediately after breakfaſt, and entreated me to accompany them; but I excuſed myſelf on pretence of finiſhing a packet to my Sophia, which really was my intention. My ſpirits however were particularly languid, and being left to my own meditations, I found myſelf unfit for writing. I ſeated myſelf therefore on the window ſeat, liſtleſs and inactive, and was revolving in my mind, among other ſubjects of uneaſineſs, the implicit ſubmiſſion and ſilence with which Lord Linroſe had received my letter, when this reverie was ſuddenly interrupted by the appearance of a chariot and four, which drove full ſpeed up the avenue; and while I was thinking with regret who this unwelcome viſitor could be, the door of the parlour opened and a ſervant announced Lord Linroſe.

My

My own perturbation, unſpeakable as it was, did not conceal from me the agitation that ſtruggled in his countenance; but my apprehenſion and aſtoniſhment on ſo unexpectedly beholding him, prevented me from diſcovering whether it was grief or pleaſure that occaſioned the hurry and emotion viſible in every feature. Hermione! Miſs Seymour! cried he, and ſeizing my hand, which he paſſionately kiſſed—Lovely and beloved Hermione, I come at laſt to claim you. Pronounce my happineſs. Tell me at once you will be mine: for now Lord Belmont no longer withholds his conſent to my wiſhes. His warmeſt approbation, his moſt fervent concurrence attends it, and he ſends you by me this tender embrace and the paternal bleſſing of his heart.

Oh! Sophia! what were at this moment my ſenſations! Doubt, joy, and aſtoniſhment, all at once overpowering my ſenſes; my eyes cloſed; I became inſenſible; and leaned unconſciouſly on Lord Linroſe's ſhoulder; while apprehenſion rendered him almoſt incapable of ſupporting or of aſſiſting me; and he waited my recovery, which was inſtantaneous, in fearful ſilence.

The moment my ſenſes were reſtored, he poured upon me ſo many grateful acknowledgments for this proof of my ſenſibility, and accuſed himſelf ſo bitterly of imprudence in having ſo ſuddenly informed me of this ſurpriſing event, that I bluſhed for the weakneſs I had betrayed, and beſought him to talk of it no more, but to inform me to what we owed this change in Lord Belmont's ſentiments.

To that angel of heaven, Lady Aubrey, cried he. It is ſhe who has opened Lord Belmont's eyes

eyes to his infatuation and injuſtice. It is ſhe who has juſtified your character in his good opinion, and effected this happy revolution in his mind. That *ſhe* alone could have produced a change ſo ſudden and ſo wonderful, he even himſelf acknowledges, while he obſtinately perſiſts in concealing the name of the perſon who has infuſed, like poiſon, the moſt injurious falſhoods into his imagination.

Whoever has done us this injury, cried I, I for my own part heartily forgive them; and I earneſtly entreat, as a proof of the truth of the profeſſions you have ſo repeatedly made me, that the recollection of it may never be the ſubject of the ſlighteſt reſentment. Oh! baniſh, I beſeech you, my Lord, baniſh all diſagreeable ſuſpicions, and every angry reflection from your thoughts, and think only of what we owe to heaven and Lady Aubrey.

To this conciliating requeſt, ſaid my Lord, I certainly ſhould not heſitate to promiſe implicit obedience; but I will not aſſume merit with you on account of a compliance which Lord Belmont, dreading the conſequences of indignation ſo juſtly excited, has already exacted. The anxiety with which he laid his commands on me never to make this tranſaction a foundation either for inveſtigation or retaliation convinced me at once—that I muſt indeed enquire no farther—though never will it be in my power in future to honour or eſteem—

Hold for heaven's ſake! cried I, frightened at the vehemence with which he ſpoke, you already infringe your promiſe. Oh! think not of diſpleaſure; but tell me what means Lady Aubrey employed to produce this wonderful change.

My

My Lord then put into my hands an open letter, which he took from his letter caſe. Here, cried he, is the invaluable performance, that was wrought with the force of magic, and not only poured conviction on Lord Belmont's mind, for that indeed is a point which time muſt naturally have of courſe effected, but with miraculous power has at once removed all thoſe barriers of prejudice and repugnance that have obſtructed my happineſs.

I inſtantly began to peruſe it; but the firſt lines affected me ſo violently, that I was unable to proceed; and my Lord inſiſted I ſhould give over the attempt till I was leſs agitated. I would then have made my eſcape in order to recover ſome degree of compoſure; but he would not ſuffer me to withdraw, and detained me by relating the effect this pathetic letter had produced on Lord Belmont.

Lord Linroſe ſaid he was not preſent when the letter was preſented to Lord Belmont; but having been an airing on horſe back, a ſervant who watched his return informed him that my Lord deſired to ſee him in his apartment.

On entering the chamber, he found his Lordſhip alone and much agitated. His features, on attempting to ſpeak, ſeemed almoſt convulſed, from the effort of ſuppreſſing his tears, which at length forced their way down his cheeks. Lord Linroſe haſtily enquired the cauſe of his emotion, but for ſome moments he was unable to explain it. Linroſe, ſaid he at laſt, be not alarmed. Read that letter. It was ſufficiently explanatory, and hardly was it finiſhed when Lord Linroſe found himſelf in his grandfather's arms. I blame myſelf ſeverely, ſaid he; but I have been deceived and miſled in a moſt ungenerous

nerous manner. I ought not however to have given implicit credit; and I will endeavour to atone for the injuſtice of my paſt conduct to theſe unfriended and neglected children, for whom you have ſo long interceded in vain.

I know, cried Lord Linroſe, haſtily firing at a ſuſpicion which he had ſo often diſmiſſed with much ſelf accuſation, it is my mother who has been ſecretly at the bottom of the affair; and I ſolemnly ſwear——

He was proceeding, he owns, in a ſtrain equally violent and improper, when Lord Belmont ſuddenly ſtopt him; and without abſolutely either affirming or denying the juſtice of the charge, told him that if he would not inſtantly give him his promiſe in the moſt ſacred manner never to attempt by any means to ſearch into the grounds of his behaviour, and whatever were his own private ſuſpicions never to dare to reſent it, his eternal diſpleaſure ſhould be the inevitable conſequence: on the contrary, ſaid he, if I find you diſpoſed to oblige me in this particular, I ſhall obſtruct your wiſhes no more.

Intoxicated with joy, I inſtantly bound myſelf by the moſt ſolemn vow, ſaid Lord Linroſe, conſcientiouſly to adhere to this command. Lord Belmont had indeed taken a method ſo effectual for ſubduing my diſpleaſure, that three words from his lips had wholly baniſhed it from my memory, and threw me into an extacy of ſpirits that made me in charity with all mankind.

Lady Aubrey, ſaid Lord Belmont, again melting at the recollections that crouded on his mind, the amiable Lady Aubrey could make me no requeſt with which I ſhould not think myſelf

bound to comply; and I conſider it as a ſingular felicity, that I poſſeſs the ability of gratifying the wiſhes of the moſt benevolent of female hearts, which, thro' my family, was in the early pride of youth and beauty, torn with diſtraction and loſt to the world. I loved and admired her with the tender partiality of a parent; and the circumſtance of her having afforded my granddaughters that friendſhip and protection which were denied them from a more natural quarter, convinces me they muſt be deſerving of the warm intereſt ſhe feels for them, and elevates her higher than ever in my eſtimation and regard.

Finding we were at Aubrey Caſtle, Lord Belmont willingly conſented to allow Lord Linroſe to ſet off early this morning, after a ſhort apology from Lord Mortonbury, which was afterwards to be followed by a fuller explanation; and having written an anſwer to Lady Aubrey's letter, to be preſented by his grandſon, promiſed to join him at this place on Wedneſday next.

Lord Linroſe having finiſhed his relation, at length permitted me to retire for a few moments to read the propitious letter which had effected ſuch miracles, and gave me Lord Belmont's anſwer to preſent to Lady Aubrey on her return from her airing. Here is a faithful copy of the former:

TO THE RIGHT HON. THE EARL OF BELMONT.

After a tedious ſpace of ſixteen mourning years, will Lord Belmont allow a long-forgotten friend to enquire, if time has wholly eraſed from his remembrance her whom once he honoured

with the name of *daughter*; who once valued herſelf on poſſeſſing a diſtinguiſhed place in his eſteem and in his affections, and who has eheriſhed towards him, amidſt the pangs of miſery, and the languor of a diſtant and melancholy ſolitude, that tender duty and filial regard, which, connected with a thouſand agonizing recollections, never can be effaced from her heart. Yes, my Lord, after a diſmal lapſe of time, memory recalls your kindneſs, your paternal careſſes, with a gratitude and chaſtened pleaſure ſcarce inferior to that which they excited when I was indeed your child; and one of the moſt fervent wiſhes of my heart is, to be allowed to think I have a father, and gratified with the permiſſion of aſking on my knees his bleſſing.

That heart, my Lord, which, worn out with ſuffering, and ſubdued by ſorrow, looked around the univerſe and beheld no ſingle remaining ſource of hope and conſolation, has lately diſcovered by the mercy of a gracious providence, one little ſpot of reſt, one prop of ſupport, that tells me I have not been bereft of all; and which bids me be grateful and reſigned. The Almighty has vouchſafed me a tender bond of union, that binds me to life and connects me with mankind. He has granted me the tender intereſt of paternal fondneſs, which, with divine influence heals the corroding remembrance of his leſs gracious diſpenſations, and preſents me with a ray of ſatisfaction even in this world Heaven has ſent me two lovely and beloved daughters, dear to my ſoul and unrivalled in my admiration, and who claim the enthuſiaſtic adoration of a parent's heart: yet by *him* alone, who enjoys a right to that ſacred title, they are aban-

abandoned and diſowned; to him the ſame healing benefit is offered; but he diſdains its acceptance, he rejects the ſoothing comfort, and will not lay hold of thoſe alleviations which a pitying Providence beſtows.

What hidden and myſterious cauſe! what unaccountable and unmerited prepoſſeſſions have baniſhed the warm benevolence, and miſled the rectitude that formed the ruling principles of Lord Belmont's character? Ah! my Lord! whatever ſecret and malevolent enemy has poiſoned your mind with doubts and prejudices, be aſſured they have not the ſlighteſt foundation in truth. Some ſelfiſh and ungenerous motive muſt have prompted theſe miſrepreſentations. Give not credit to ſo baſe a lie. Conſent but to behold your innocent, your amiable grandchildren, and every ſuſpicion will be refuted, all mediation uſeleſs, and perſuaſion at an end. Subdued and enchanted, you will take them to your paternal boſom, you will deſire to attach them to you by ſtill cloſer ties, by the ſpontaneous bonds of gratitude and obligation. You will love them with the fondneſs of a father: you will love them perhaps *as I love them:* and their unremitting and affectionate duty will give additional intereſt to your exiſtence, as it conſtitutes the ſole bleſſing of mine.

The youngeſt of theſe valuable young women, has already diſpoſed of her hand to a gentleman of ſingular worth, but whoſe fortune equals not his merit. The eldeſt, whoſe charms are of the moſt inſinuating nature, beautiful and enchanting as an angel, unites with the moſt acute ſenſibility, that diſintereſted generoſity and high ſenſe of honour, in which genuine virtue conſiſts. Adoring and adored by her couſin

Lord

Lord Linroſe, ſhe heroically prefers the tranquillity of the parent who rejects her, and whoſe miſguided prepoſſeſſions ſhe muſt ever deplore, to the certain happineſs it was in her option to have enjoyed; and what, alas! required tenfold fortitude——which it was in her power to have conferred.

Will you, my Lord, allow a ſacrifice like this to remain unrewarded? Will you permit two amiable young people to continue diſappointed and unhappy, who but for a juſt ſenſe of filial piety would have been bleſſed in each other? Ah! no! your Lordſhip requires but the film that blinded you to be taken from your eyes, and I feel that I have already prevailed. You will no longer deny yourſelf the delight of participating in the felicity you are enabled to beſtow, and your generous mind will experience ſatisfaction in affording a lively ſenſation of pleaſure, to her whoſe heart has ſo long bled for, and now deeply partakes in the ſufferings of her young friends, but who ſhall ever remain, with implicit ſubmiſſion and the warmeſt regard,

Your Lordſhip's affectionate daughter,
and obedient ſervant,

JULIA AUBREY.

AUBREY CASTLE, AUG. 2.

I was not recovered from the emotion into which the peruſal of this affecting letter had thrown me, when I heard Lady Aubrey's foot on the ſtairs, followed by my ſiſter. Eager to inform them what had taken place ſince the morning, I flew to the door juſt as they were paſſing in order to enter the adjoining drawing-room;

room; and incapable at that moment either of calmly explaining the cauſe of my perturbation, or of conquering its violence, I threw myſelf into the arms of the dear friend to whom I owed ſo much, and ſobbed upon her neck without being able to utter one word.

Fanny was terrified, and Lady Aubrey for an inſtant aſtoniſhed and alarmed: but her own letter, which I held open in my hand, and the knowledge of Lord Linroſe's arrival, which ſhe had learnt below, ſoon relieved her fears, and told her what I was unable to expreſs.

Lord Belmont has then yielded, my love, has he not? cried ſhe, warmly returning my embraces. Oh! I hoped much from the generous benevolence of that worthy man's diſpoſition. It was the apprehenſion of retaining you in a painful ſtate of ſuſpenſe, which I could not be *certain* would not have been ſucceeded by diſappointment, prevented me from acquainting you with this laſt and fortunate attempt to ſoften him in your favour, till I was informed of its ſucceſs.

Fanny was in extacies, and wept and laughed by turns; but ſoon growing more compoſed, I delivered to Lady Aubrey the letter from Lord Belmont.

She ſeemed much affected even with the ſight of the writing. Her hand ſhook violently on receiving it from me, and ſhe inſtantly retired with it into her own chamber. Fanny then left me, to congratulate Lord Linroſe, whom ſhe was impatient to ſee; and I found it impoſſible to taſte ſatisfaction while my ever dear Lady Aubrey's generous participation in my happineſs was damped with ſo much pain, and mingled with ſo many contending feelings. I ventured

not

not for ſome time to intrude on her retirement; but at length apprehenſion carried me to the door of her apartment, where I overheard her weeping with ſo much anguiſh, that I took courage to make an attempt to enter. It was faſtened on the inſide, however, and I withdrew in reſpectful ſilence.

Short was this indulgence of ſorrow. In half an hour ſhe joined me with a placid and compoſed countenance, and having once more embraced and congratulated me, gave me Lord Belmont's letter to peruſe, and went to welcome Lord Linroſe.

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE COUNTESS OF AUBREY.

MY DEAR MADAM,

Be aſſured it is in the power neither of time nor abſence to diminiſh that warm affection, which, founded on the higheſt eſteem and admiration, never while life and reaſon holds, can be weakened in my boſom. The letter you have honoured me with has but augmented the enthuſiaſtic regard with which every tender recollection of Lady Aubrey has ever been accompanied; and the humane and benevolent application it contains, while it gratifies my moſt anxious wiſh in affording me an opportunity of obliging her, leaves only this painful regret on my mind, that from credulity and remiſſion I have allowed ſuch an application to be made. To acknowledge and to protect theſe helpleſs young women, was the undoubted duty of a parent, and a duty, which, but for the miſrepreſentations of a ſecret enemy, ſhould have been long ere now conſcientiouſly diſcharged. But *to bind them to me by*

ſi-

ſtill cloſer ties, to allow of an alliance with my grandſon, the ſource of my deareſt hopes and expectations, to diſmiſs the proſpect of a long cheriſhed ſcheme, which muſt have ſecured to him connexions of unbounded intereſt and importance, is a conceſſion which Lady Aubrey alone could have procured—a revolution, that ſhe of the whole world only could have effected. When her enlarged and generous mind teaches me a leſſon ſo noble, prejudice is ſubdued, and that repugnance which aided my credulity, vaniſhes and is forgotten.

My grandſon deſires the honour of delivering this letter. He carries my bleſſings to all my children, accompanied with a requeſt that I may be allowed to embrace them on Wedneſday. Among the number, more numerous than I ever expected to behold them, none claims a warmer ſentiment of pleaſure at meeting, than that beloved and eſteemed daughter to whom I have the unſpeakable ſatisfaction and honour of ſubſcribing myſelf,

her affectionate father, and
moſt obedient ſervant,

BELMONT.

MORTON HALL, AUG. 3.

Lady Aubrey returned juſt as I had done reading this kind epiſtle, telling me that Lord Linroſe was reproaching me for having deſerted the company.

On joining it, the traces of tears were ſtill viſible on my countenance, and the conſciouſneſs of my betrayed emotions made me enter the drawing-room with a degree of timidity. My Lord and Mr. Howard ſmiled affectionately on

on approaching me. I believe, cried the latter, my congratulations were rather premature ſome time ago, but I hope I may repeat them now with all ſafety. I am not a little vain, added he, turning aſide to Lord Linroſe, of my talent of preſcience, for I foreſaw this happy event, and no obſtacles or difficulties have been able to convince me that it would not one day take place.

AUGUST 4.

When we parted laſt night, Lord Linroſe made me promiſe to walk out with him this morning before breakfaſt. You know I generally riſe early; and to-day I was not particularly late. We had a delightful walk, and a long and moſt intereſting converſation before any of the family were ſtirring.

Lady Aubrey ſeems much agitated with the thoughts of to-morrow's interview. It appears formidable even to me; but to her—ah! how much more painful muſt it prove? She has been very thoughtful all this day; and I obſerved, often endeavoured to ſuppreſs a ſtarting tear, by covering it with a ſmile that but half performed its duty. Were the firſt meeting over, I cannot help flattering myſelf that cuſtom will ſoon baniſh the painful reflections with which the ſight of Lord Belmont cannot fail to be attended, and that lenient conſequences will flow from this re-union, ſo ſoothing and ſalutary to the

the tender and gentle nature of this amiable woman.

H. SEYMOUR.

LETTER XXV.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

AUGUST 6.

THIS interview, ſo anxiouſly and ſo long deſired, took place yeſterday.

Lady Aubrey's eyes, at breakfaſt, betrayed how the night had been paſſed; and as for myſelf, I felt as if I was on the eve of an event, the conſequences of which were formidable and precarious. Fanny ſeemed to partake very little in theſe apprehenſions. All her anxiety was in regard to my appearance, which ſhe rendered as agreeable as poſſible in my grandfather's eyes, as an apology for the imprudence of Lord Linroſe's attachment; and ſhe helped to adjuſt my dreſs with an eager anxiety that my uneaſineſs on Lady Aubrey's account hardly rendered me capable of attending to.

My Lord and Mr. Howard had agreed to ride out, that they might not be in the way when Lord Belmont was introduced to us; and about one his Lordſhip arrived, having ſlept on the road, and travelled ſlowly.

My ſiſter and I trembled to leave Lady Aubrey in that ſtate of agitation into which even the ſight of this carriage at a diſtance had thrown her;

her; but we obeyed the hint ſhe gave us to allow her to receive him alone; and having made her ſwallow a few drops in water, we withdrew into the adjoining library, which is ſeparated from her dreſſing-room only by a thin partition.

We had ſcarce time to enter it, when the ſound of ſteps aſcending the ſtairs, threw me into a tremor not to be conceived. The door of my dreſſing-room was preſently after thrown open, and a ſervant pronounced the name of Lord Belmont, and inſtantly withdrew.

A ſhort ſilence enſued, which terrified me with the apprehenſion of Lady Aubrey's having fainted. This alarm was but too ſoon confirmed, from hearing Lord Belmont call out, in a voice of hurry and affright—Who's there? Good God, who's there? and the bell was inſtantly rung with great violence.

My ſiſter and I, overpowered with terror, and forgetful of every thing but our dear and invaluable friend, then burſt into the room. She had ſunk upon the ſopha, and lay inſenſible, Lord Belmont hanging over her with all the deſpair of conſcious inability to afford her aſſiſtance.

What a moment, in which for the firſt time to behold our grandfather! Anxiouſly as I had expected this interview, and formidable as it had appeared, I ſcarce regarded him; I almoſt forgot he was preſent; and flying to Lady Aubrey, I ſupported her head in my trembling arms, while Fanny and the maid, who had been ſummoned from below, adminiſtered ſalts, and beſprinkled her face with lavender water.

Seeing her beginning to recover, my ſiſter had the preſence of mind to ſend away the maid, and

and Lady Aubrey ſoon after opened her lovely eyes. Returning recollection made her feebly raiſe her head, as if to ſeek Lord Belmont, who had prudently withdrawn behind from the fear that beholding him again too ſuddenly might occaſion a relapſe. But her emotions fortunately now took a leſs alarming turn; and claſping me in her arms as ſhe reclined upon my neck, the fullneſs of her heart got vent in tears and ſobs that ſeemed to rend her boſom; while the conflict of my feelings was ſo dreadful, that I cannot conceive how my ſenſes ſtood the ſhock they ſuſtained at that inſtant.

Lord Belmont, extremely affected, had moved towards us; but apprehenſive of encreaſing the violence of Lady Aubrey's feelings, and wholly ſubdued by his own, he ſtood for a moment irreſolute, whether or not he ſhould advance. At length burſting into a violent flood of tears—by Heavens this is too much! cried he, and ſuddenly retreated, as if unable to ſupport this ſcene.

Lady Aubrey, as yet ſcarce capable of articulating, prevented his withdrawing by holding out her hand to him, which he kiſſed with the moſt moving tenderneſs; and ſhe fell into his arms in an agony of pathetic ſorrow, which the moſt hardened and inſenſible could not have witneſſed without being melted with compaſſion. Lord Belmont's whole ſoul ſeemed ſoftened into pity, and he wept immoderately.

There is ſomething peculiarly affecting in any violent expreſſions of grief in an old man: one is ſo little accuſtomed to behold them give way to the ſofter feelings, that when they burſt the reſtraints of fortitude, it appears a ſort of convulſion that is terrifying. Lady Aubrey, on per-

perceiving the poignancy of his emotions, was inſtantly ſeized with an alarm which ſeemed to operate effectually in aiding her re-compoſure, or rather in inſpiring her with reſolution for ſtruggling to attain it. She was for a moment calm—Oh my Lord! I am wounding, I am deſtroying you, cried ſhe; but behold the all-powerful conſolation I promiſed you—behold your children!

She diſengaged herſelf from his embraces, and perhaps, Sophia, you will conclude that my ſiſter and I inſtantly fell at our grandfather's feet and implored his bleſſing; but though this behaviour might have been more becoming, and perhaps in ſome people more natural, *my* feelings operated very differently. The tenderneſs of his manner to Lady Aubrey, and the benevolent expreſſion diffuſed over his aged countenance, had at the firſt glance deprived him of the ſtern aſpect with which my imagination had inveſted him, and a ſtrong and obvious look of my dear father, which ſtruck that moment at my heart with the force of an electrical ſhock, inſtead of throwing me on my knees, conveyed me into his arms; where melted and ſubdued, had not ſobs relieved me, I muſt have fainted away.

My ſiſter followed my example the moment I had a little recovered myſelf. He embraced us both with infinite affection; and Lady Aubrey's tears flowed with a freedom and profuſion that greatly relieved my apprehenſions, and her own ſufferings.

Permit me to leave you for one half hour, ſaid Lord Belmont. I ſhall be enabled preſently to behold my dear daughters with more compoſure, and their gentle hearts will be fortified by my abſence. Is there not a ſon too, to whom I have

I have ſtill to be introduced? I will find Linroſe, and deſire him to preſent me to Mr. Howard.

I perceive they are juſt returned, cried Fanny, who had ſeen them from the windows; and my Lord left us with precipitation under pretence of going to join them.

The inſtant he was gone, the momentary compoſure which Lady Aubrey had laboured to maintain, entirely forſook her, and the violence of her perturbation was ſucceeded by a weakneſs, languor, and depreſſion, that ſeemed wholly to overpower her, and rendered me extremely apprehenſive that this interview would be far from promoting the comfort and tranquillity of her mind. By the time that Lord Belmont returned, however, ſhe was ſedate and collected, yet both her health and looks have evidently ſuffered, though thank Heaven not very materially, from this ſhock.

Eager to avoid any ſubject that might lead to mournful retroſpections, Lord Belmont anxiouſly entered into converſation on matters leſs affecting, but equally intereſting. He deſired a particular account of our ſituation in all reſpects, from our arrival in England to my ſiſter's marriage, and expreſſed himſelf much pleaſed with Mr. Howard, to whom he had been introduced below. Both his expreſſion and his manner were kind to exceſs; and he blamed himſelf ſeverely for the part he had been induced to act. I muſt endeavour to atone to my children, ſaid he, for my paſt behaviour in a way that I hope will baniſh it from their remembrance, tho' the recollection ever muſt wound my own

I could have told him, had I been able to ſummon courage, that one word from his lips had

had already more than atoned for fifty times the uneaſineſs his rejection had occaſioned; but I could only preſs his hand, as he held mine in his. I almoſt think he underſtood this ſilent token of gratitude, for he embraced me affectionately.

Lord Linroſe and Mr. Howard having allowed a ſufficient time for this explanatory converſation, then entered. The appearance of the former for the firſt few minutes overwhelmed me with confuſion. I recollected the repugnance with which my grandfather had ſo long liſtened to his ſolicitations in my behalf, and recalled with pain the reluctant conſent which Lady Aubrey's interference had extorted. My confidence however was ſoon reſtored by the extreme affection and condeſcenſion of Lord Belmont; who, as if he had penetrated into my thoughts, and read my embarraſſment, ſeemed to make me the object of his peculiar regard. He received, with infinite marks of ſatisfaction, all the little attentions which the pleaſing idea of poſſeſſing a parent who claimed them, excited from my ſiſter and myſelf, was delighted with the information of our progreſs in different accompliſhments, ſuch as muſic, painting, &c. advantages which Lady Aubrey took care to diſplay with all the exaggeration of maternal partiality, and when we were ſeating ourſelves at table, ordered Lord Linroſe to give him up the place of which he was about to take poſſeſſion between Lady Aubrey and me. You begin to monopolize before your time, Sir, ſaid he with a ſmile that covered me with bluſhes. He is indeed the moſt amiable old man I ever beheld, and muſt have been uncommonly handſome I think in his youth; though I will not deny

deny but that an air of conſcious dignity, accompanied even with a look of auſterity, is diffuſed over it, that may not at firſt ſight prove prepoſſeſſing in the eyes of a ſtranger. But to his friends and to his children, he appears only what in fact he is, all condeſcenſion and benevolence. His reſemblance to my father is ſo obvious, that he recalls him every day to my remembrance, and you may recollect how much you uſed to admire the noble expreſſion of *his* countenance.

Were his tenderneſs to my ſiſter and myſelf wholly out of the queſtion, his behaviour to Lady Aubrey would entirely gain my heart. Every look teſtifies the warmth of his admiration and reſpect; even the very tone of his voice on addreſſing her, is expreſſive of affection; and on her part, tho' the agitating ſcene of the morning ſeemed to have unhinged her nerves, and wholly exhauſted her ſtrength and ſpirits, his Lordſhip's tenderneſs appears to have recruited both. She is truly ſenſible of his goodneſs; and receives all his attentions with a mournful pleaſure, which while it revives her ſorrows, and encreaſes her melancholy, ſooths and gratifies her heart.

Hurt by the idea of overclouding the happineſs, (which however combated by ſympathy and compaſſion, Lord Belmont's arrival had univerſally diffuſed), ſhe exerted herſelf yeſterday evening to appear chearful; but the effort was apparent; ſhe converſed on indifferent topics with ſeeming intereſt; but it was eaſy to divine that her thoughts were not preſent; and at laſt ſhe inſiſted that I ſhould ſit down to the harpſichord and ſing to my grandfather a little French air, which he had ſaid he particularly admired.

The

The firſt few notes however obliged her to leave the room, and I found it impoſſible to proceed.

This day, thank Heaven, I think her ſpirits are leſs depreſſed. She had a long private converſation in the morning with Lord Belmont, chiefly in regard to our affairs, and ſeems to have been more relieved than affected by it. My Lord acknowledged to her every circumſtance of the conduct of Lady Linroſe, but requeſted that particular care might be taken not to encreaſe the reſentment of her ſon by an open avowal of the ungenerous part ſhe has ſecretly acted.

Her behaviour, ſaid my Lord, has betrayed a degree of meanneſs, art, and duplicity, which convince me ſhe is capable of any ſtep, however irregular, from which ſhe has hopes of attaining a favourite point. *I* ſhall myſelf therefore break off all connection with her in future; but I ſhould be ſorry to involve Linroſe in a difference with his mother, and if our Hermione be as amiable as her lovely countenance beſpeaks her, ſhe will incline to ſoften rather than exaſperate an indignation too juſtly excited. Oh, Sophia! how proud and how pleaſed did this partial compliment from my grandfather make me!

Lady Aubrey aſſured him of my placable diſpoſition, and ſaid ſhe was certain I ſhould be infinitely ſhocked with the apprehenſion of occaſioning a rupture between them. I am convinced, added ſhe, that her preſent happineſs has already obliterated from her mind all reſentment in regard to Lady Linroſe; yet when ſhe recalls the comfortleſs, unconnected ſituation in which ſhe and her ſiſter found themſelves at

the very moment that ſhe ſo unfeelingly tranſmitted to them the account of your Lordſhip's determination, a determination which undoubtedly her own miſrepreſentations had effected, there is perhaps ſome little merit in diſmiſſing indignation.

As an apology for the unkindneſs of my conduct, ſaid my Lord, I muſt requeſt you, my dear Madam, to peruſe this letter, which I received from Lady Linroſe in December laſt.

Lady Aubrey immediately read it; and afterwards repeated to us the contents as faithfully as her memory could retain them.

Lady Linroſe began by informing Lord Belmont that ſhe was about to acquaint him with an affair that had given her infinite vexation, and which ſhe was afraid would involve his Lordſhip in much difficulty and uneaſineſs. She then tells him that his two grand-daughters had taken the imprudent ſtep (without any previous application or advice), of coming over to England; where they had lately arrived merely attended by a gentleman, who it was ſaid was much devoted to them. After imprudently lodging all together in the houſe of a woman of very doubtful character, and aſſociating almoſt ſolely with the famous Mrs. Weldon, with whom they had been intimate abroad, who was kept at preſent by a profligate young man of fortune, they had applied to her (Lady Linroſe) as a relation from whom they expected countenance and civilities; and to this, her Ladyſhip adds, they would juſtly have been entitled, had not the glaring impropriety of their conduct rendered any attention on her part, on account of her daughters, wholly out of the queſtion.

Theſe

Theſe were circumſtances, ſhe ſaid, much to be regretted: but alas this unexpected journey to England had been attended by conſequences ſtill more diſagreeable, and indeed truly alarming: her ſon Roatſley had accidentally ſeen, and was become paſſionately enamoured of the eldeſt of theſe girls; though from a ſingular train of particulars, too tedious to detail, added to their having retained the name by which they had been hitherto known, he was ſtill ignorant of the relationſhip that ſubſiſted between them. Artful, beautiful, and deſigning, this young woman had ſpread every ſnare of coquetry and inſinuation to captivate him, in which ſhe had ſo entirely ſucceeded that he was blind to her imprudence, nor would liſten to any attempts made by his friends to open his eyes.

She had no doubt, her Ladyſhip continued, but the ladies would ſoon prevail with Roatſley to intercede with his Lordſhip in their favour, though as yet no explanation on that head ſeemed to have taken place between them; and added, that were it not for the unfortunate circumſtance of his attachment, which abſolutely required every poſſible check and diſcouragement, it would doubtleſs have been a natural and humane act to have endeavoured to reſtrain the conduct of the girls within the bounds of propriety and decency; and to affect this deſirable end, the notice and protection of their friends might have proved conducive: but at preſent ſhe was convinced any favour or attentions afforded them would but give life to thoſe romantic hopes which the dependent and unconnected obſcurity of their ſituation had hitherto ſuppreſſed.

She then desires to have his Lordship's commands in what manner she should conduct herself on the occasion, to which she promises the most dutiful and implicit submission; and requests that his Lordship may not on any account allow her son to suspect that she had ever entered with him on this subject, as it could serve no purpose but that of producing endless quarrels and altercations between them, and he would be apt to *suspect her* (she adds), of having prepossessed him against them. Her Ladyship, after a great deal more to the same purpose, concludes with these words, which Lady Aubrey repeated verbatim, "The young ladies, I understand, intend addressing your Lordship in a letter, which I shall take particular care to dispatch the moment it is committed to my charge."

This letter, however, my Lord informed Lady Aubrey, never had arrived, though Lady Linrose in her next informed him that she had sent it off some days before. I was little solicitous, said his Lordship, about the fate of an epistle which the alarm I had received from the intelligence of my grandson's folly rendered me unwilling to peruse; but I doubt if it was ever intended for my sight, from the moment in which it reached the hands of that artful woman. At the time however no suspicion entered my thoughts. Shocked at the danger which threatened all my favourite schemes for Linrose, I instantly desired his mother by every means in her power to discourage his passion, and to prevent the slightest intercourse between her family and these imprudent girls, whose ill conduct, added to my grandson's infatuation, determined me to renounce them; and I ordered her to assure them

them that my reſolution, neither to behold nor acknowledge them, was irrevocable. I made enquiry however in what ſituation they were in regard to fortune, and was pleaſed to find that their finances were in a ſituation that required not the interference of my aſſiſtance. Even this account, Linroſe tells me, was falſe; for the unlucky failure of their guardian rendered their circumſtances ſo uncomfortable, that an application was made to him by one of their friends for ſome aſſiſtance, which I believe he intended to convey in the moſt delicate manner he could contrive under the borrowed form of a penſion from government.

On this head, ſaid Lady Aubrey, I muſt exculpate Lady Linroſe from blame; for the circumſtance of Mr. Benſeley's affairs I am convinced never came to her knowledge; and when ſhe informed your Lordſhip that their ſituation required no aid, ſhe was herſelf probably of that opinion. I muſt likewiſe obſerve, that though this account of their ſituation received from her pen all the exaggeration that art and prejudice could give it, yet it is poſſible that upon her firſt private enquiries in regard to them, ſhe might have conceived a very unjuſt and unfavourable opinion of their behaviour. A variety of injurious rumours were the diſagreeable conſequence of their imprudence in lodging with a woman, of whoſe character they were not particularly informed; and the unlucky intimacy which for a ſhort time ſubſiſted between them and Mrs. Weldon, owing to that abandoned woman's having art in getting admitted into very

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reſpectable ſociety abroad, muſt have confirmed her error.

Yes, Madam, ſaid Lord Belmont; but when ſhe was herſelf undeceived, then, in honour, in juſtice, ſhe was bound to have removed the diſguſt ſhe had implanted: but inſtead of purſuing this path, the whole of her conduct diſcovers the moſt deſpicable and ungenerous artifice. In a late letter dated from Holtenham Abbey, ſhe tells me that my grandchildren are behaving with greater propriety than could have been expected; that the youngeſt had lately married the gentleman who had attended them from the Continent, a circumſtance ſhe obſerves that looked well; and that her ſiſter reſided with them in that county, where they lived with credit. As they were but lately arrived and little known, nobody there ſhe ſays ſeemed acquainted with their late levity of conduct. This decorum, whether real or aſſumed, merely for the purpoſe of deceiving Linroſe, was extremely alarming, ſhe adds, as they had acquired a reputation which youth and beauty, when attended with art, ſeldom found it difficult to obtain, where a favourite point was at ſtake. Thus, by working forcibly on my apprehenſions in regard to my grandſon, and repreſenting my granddaughters in this unfavourable point of view, ſhe evidently aimed at prepoſſeſſing me ſo ſtrongly againſt them, as to render me on my return neither particular in my enquiries, nor in any way ſolicitous about them: while at the ſame time, ſhould at length the real truth tranſpire, ſhe preſerved the ſalvo of having been herſelf deceived.

To theſe accuſations Lady Aubrey could have added the artful viſit ſhe made at Hubert Hill, and

and the feigned civilities and expreſſions of friendſhip by which ſhe had endeavoured to gain our confidence, and lull her ſon's ſuſpicions, as affording her the means of ſeparating us from Lord Belmont with greater facility and leſs danger of detection; but unwilling to exaſperate where ſhe was certain *I* would wiſh to reconcile, Lady Aubrey forebore acquainting him with this part of her behaviour.

She diſcovered however, in the courſe of this converſation, that Lord Linroſe had partly hinted to him the approbation and admiration with which his mother had beheld us; but this having been followed by no particulars, and Lord Linroſe having merely advanced that circumſtance during the heat of their altercation as an argument in our favour, it had made no great impreſſion on Lord Belmont's mind. I ſhould be much diſtreſſed, Sophia, to be the means of occaſioning diviſions in a family with whom I am ſoon to be intimately connected. I ſhall endeavour therefore as much as is poſſible to keep all aggravating additions from Lord Belmont's knowledge, as well as to perſuade Lord Linroſe into conciliating meaſures; who, tho' he is withheld from openly teſtifying his reſentment, cannot talk of his mother's conduct with patience, even while he is ignorant of the extent of her artifice.

After this full and candid explanation, my Lord expreſſed in the ſtrongeſt and moſt flattering terms his warm approbation of his grandſon's choice, and ſpoke of me with a partial admiration that delighted the heart of our invaluable friend; and on being faithfully repeated to me, filled mine with gratitude and pleaſure. Linroſe, he ſaid, was impatient to have matters

ters concluded; and indeed, conſidering the happineſs that awaited him, his eagerneſs was both natural and excuſable. The ceremony therefore ſhould be no longer delayed, than till the papers and ſettlements could be made out.

Having concluded this minute detail, I have one favour to requeſt of my Hermione, added Lady Aubrey, and I flatter myſelf ſhe will not refuſe me. It is, that you will not think of leaving this houſe, my love, till you have given your hand to Lord Linroſe. Let me have the pleaſure of thinking, that as under this roof you have experienced the moſt painful moments that hopeleſs love could feel, under this roof your future happineſs will be ſecured as far as the affection, gratitude, and admiration of a tender huſband can ſecure it.

To this kind requeſt you may believe I gave a grateful and willing aſſent, provided Lord Belmont approved of the propoſal. I even entreated that ſhe would endeavour if poſſible to prevail with him to agree to it: for I am extremely apprehenſive, from a hint he let drop this morning, that he has got the frightful intention of giving to this affair the air of a formal celebration, by inviting diſtant relations of the family, and introducing pomp and ceremonials, where privacy with a very few friends is ſo much more ſuitable to the awful ſolemnity of the occaſion. Lord Belmont, it is not difficult to perceive, is not eaſily moved by perſuaſion to alter a determined purpoſe; but Heaven grant that in this inſtance, as in ſo many ſtill more arduous, Lady Aubrey's unbounded influence may prevail.

AUGUST 8.

Lord Linroſe and I, who contrive to ſteal a private walk every morning before breakfaſt, had a violent diſpute during our early ramble to-day. He inſiſted that there was no neceſſity for waiting the tedious forms of law, ſince they could go on at leiſure fully as well after as before the ceremony was performed; and to defer it till Dudley Mount was fitted up for our reception was, he ſaid, the moſt uſeleſs and abſurd formality, when ſo many kind friends were quarrelling who ſhould have the firſt viſit from us; and at all events we could take up our reſidence if we choſe it at Alton Park with Lord Belmont.

I did not wiſh to appear affected; yet the proſpect of an event that I had believed at the diſtance of ſome weeks, threw me into conſternation; and the urgency with which my Lord laboured to reconcile me to this haſty ſcheme, convinced me he would eaſily contrive to ſurmount any obſtacles that Lord Belmont might oppoſe to it.

I therefore entreated him to give over all thoughts of ſo precipitate a plan, and to wait till every thing was quietly and properly adjuſted. In the mean time I told him I ſhould divide my time equally between Hubert Hill and Aubrey Caſtle; and as he muſt find himſelf equally at home at both thoſe places, we might contrive to be conſtantly together.

My arguments were without effect. *He* continued to perſuade, and *I* to remonſtrate. I think, at length cried he laughing, no plan remains for me but one, and that one is ſo natural on the preſent occaſion, and muſt appear to all

who hear of it ſo happy a termination to thoſe endleſs difficulties and punctilios, that though you may not approve of the ſcheme, I make no doubt time and contrition might prevail with you to forgive it; at leaſt I may venture to hazard your diſpleaſure in a cauſe that would ſo amply recompenſe me for the utmoſt ſeverity of its effect. I ſhall have my carriage and ſervants in waiting to carry you off ſome morning when you are walking, and my grandfather's chaplain will have no ſcruples to deter him from performing a ceremony that is merely deferred from motives of abſurd propriety.

He had ſcarce finiſhed this ſentence, when Lord Belmont ſuddenly joined us from the next walk. He ſmiled at my confuſion; but kindly taking my hand, had you really attempted this wild ſcheme ſome weeks ago, Linroſe, ſaid he, I might have been *offended*; but I think, conſidering the temptation, I could not poſſibly have been *ſurpriſed*; however you may now ſummon a little patience to your aid, and a few weeks will adjuſt every thing to your ſatisfaction.

A few weeks, my Lord! exclaimed Lord Linroſe. Your Lordſhip requires patience with a vengeance; but there is not the ſlighteſt chance that mine will hold out one third of the time.

I implored him by a look to defer the ſubject, but it was with evident difficulty and reluctance he obeyed me.

Well, Linroſe, we ſhall ſee, cried Lord Belmont, and we ſoon after reached the houſe.

The family were juſt aſſembled at breakfaſt; and Lady Aubrey appeared in better looks and ſpirits than ſhe has enjoyed ſince the receipt of

Lord

Lord Belmont's letter. The company were all gaiety; and Lord Linroſe having whiſpered to Mrs. Howard the circumſtance of Lord Belmont having detected our morning tete-a-tete, ſhe had the giddineſs to ſay aloud that ſhe underſtood an elopement was projected from Aubrey Caſtle, which ſhe doubted not would ſoon take place unleſs Lord Belmont interfered to protect the injured honour of his family.

Yes, ſaid my Lord, I muſt protect my daughter from the effects of an impetuoſity, which I ſuſpect will require all her gentleneſs and good ſenſe to keep within proper bounds; but I ſee no method ſo well calculated for promoting this end as the one I am convinced ſhe will be apt on all occaſions to adopt—that of *yielding the point*. You and I, my dear Madam, added he to Lady Aubrey, will diſcuſs this matter afterwards.

The worſt of all ways of *gaining a point*, cried Fanny, and a moſt abominable precedent for married women. I hope at leaſt my ſiſter won't think of introducing it at Hubert Hill.

Lord Belmont, with whom ſhe is a great favourite, told her that he was convinced, as ſhe had got the ſtart of me in matrimony, I ſhould in ſo acting merely follow the example ſet me by my youngeſt ſiſter. I ſoon contrived to eſcape from this converſation, in which I found it impoſſible to join; and the moment I was gone, Lord Linroſe earneſtly entreated Lady Aubrey to endeavour to reconcile me to a ſpeedy celebration. The matter being then debated in full council, it was at length determined that our marriage ſhould be concluded at Aubrey Caſtle; and that the day following the whole party ſhould ſet off together for Hubert Hill, the vicinity of which ſituation to Dudley Mount

Mount rendered it a convenient reſidence for Lord Linroſe, as well as an agreeable one for all the others.

This being reſolved, though without my having been conſulted on the matter, Lord Linroſe flew to find me, in order to communicate this ſudden change of meaſures. I was quietly ſeated in the library, though not very buſy at my ſtudies when he entered. My deareſt Miſs Seymour, cried he, a plan has been propoſed and univerſally approved of, which I hope you will not be ſo inhuman as to oppoſe by any cold and fruitleſs objections. Lord Belmont, Lady Aubrey, and in ſhort our whole friends, join in opinion, that the ſooner my happineſs is completed the better; and a thouſand reaſons, independent of my impatience, conſpire to render it not merely proper but neceſſary. Lady Aubrey, whoſe maternal affection juſtly entitles her to every maternal privilege, with her uſual unbounded goodneſs has condeſcended to name the very day of my happineſs; and Wedneſday next, my deareſt Hermione, will behold me the moſt envied of mankind. Oh! generouſly tell me that you will not invent unneceſſary delays—tell me that you heſitate no longer.

I did not affect a reluctance to oblige him: but agitated as I was, conſented with that ſoothing ſatisfaction that ever attends our compliance to the entreaties of thoſe we anxiouſly deſire to pleaſe. The gratitude of Lord Linroſe was as fervent as had been his urgency. But hearing ome perſon on the ſtairs, I made my eſcape to my own dreſſing-room, where Lady Aubrey ſoon joined me.

She repeated to me the above information; and told me, that warmly experiencing the tender

der anxieties of a mother, ſhe had ventured to aſſume the rights of that character in fixing the day, and may Heaven, my Hermione, render every anniverſary of Wedneſday next more tranquil than that awful day can prove, that unites us even to what our hearts hold moſt dear on earth, and if poſſible ſtill more happy.

Oh! Sophia! in four days my fate will be determined. Mr. Price, the huſband of our friend Miſs Parſons, who I find was originally tutor to Lord Linroſe, and is particularly eſteemed by him, has it ſeems long indulged the hopes of performing one day the ſacred ceremony that muſt aſcertain the pupil's happineſs or miſery in life; and a meſſenger has been actually diſpatched to him, deſiring his attendance here on Wedneſday. On this occaſion Lady Aubrey willingly conſented to Fanny's requeſt, that Mrs. Price ſhould be invited to accompany her huſband; and as I thought our little friend would be gratified with the compliment, I did not oppoſe it.

Adieu, my beloved friend! for the firſt and laſt time of my aſſuming the name, let me ſubſcribe myſelf

your affectionate and ſincere friend,

H. DUDLEY.

LETTER

LETTER XXVI.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

HUBERT HILL, AUG. 16.

ONCE more, my deareſt Sophia, I write from Hubert Hill. This delightful abode, where, accompanied by the happy party from Aubrey Caſtle, I arrived on Friday forenoon.

Your Hermione, in preſence of theſe dear and amiable friends, gave her hand to Lord Linroſe on Wedneſday laſt. No addition was made to the family on that occaſion, Mr. and Mrs. Price excepted, from whom we parted on Thurſday morning, as this little manſion could not have contained more viſitors than at preſent are its inhabitants.

We were charmed to perceive the agreeable alteration which an eaſy mind and comfortable circumſtances have produced in the looks of Mrs. Price. Her huſband is a very amiable man; and her ſituation is in all reſpects as happy as it lately was the reverſe. Mrs. Hindon, ſhe told us, had received her, now her affairs no longer require her aid, with prodigious kindneſs, and had given her and Mr. Price an invitation to ſpend ſome weeks at her houſe; and though I ſhall always continue on good terms with my aunt, ſaid ſhe, I have had enough of her family, and ſhall not be in haſte to accept her offer.

The formidable day, my Sophia, was paſſed in our uſual way. Lady Aubrey, who always judges with peculiar good ſenſe and propriety,

would

would allow of no forms. Every thing went on as it had done on the preceding day, excepting that the ſervants and tenants had a ball and plentiful dinner provided for them in the hall; but as there was no neceſſity for my making my appearance, I merely partook of their mirth from hearing the diſtant ſound of the fiddles from below.

A licence having been procured, Mr. Price performed the ceremony; after which we ſat down as uſual to our cuſtomary employments, and cards and backgammon divided the evening. Lady Aubrey's agitation during the ſervice almoſt equalled mine; but thank Heaven her ſpirits of late have been chearful and compoſed, and I truſt every ſucceeding day will bring her additional comfort and ſatisfaction.

The company of Lady Linroſe, on this occaſion, you may ſuppoſe was neither expected nor deſired. Lord Linroſe had in a cold letter informed her of the event a few days before it took place; but the preſence of Lord Belmont, who had written her in a very deciſive manner that they muſt meet no more, afforded an eaſy pretext for not requeſting that of her Ladyſhip. All the notice Lord Linroſe took of this rupture was, to tell her that as his grandfather appeared offended by ſome private particulars of her Ladyſhip's conduct, it was not in his power to ſolicit the honour of a viſit from her on the occaſion of an event which a multiplicity of miſrepreſentations and miſtakes had unhappily too long deferred.

On the evening of the day on which we got hither, we all walked out, to ſhew Lord Belmont the beauties of this charming place; and oh! Sophia! what an altered aſpect every object wore,

wore, from the languor that ſo lately inveſted them. Lord Linroſe led the way to the ſpot by the ſide of the river, once the ſcene of ſo much confuſion and perplexity to me, when he ſtole upon me unperceived and firſt made the diſcovery of my affections. He had the delicacy however to make no other obſervation on the occaſion than to talk of the romantic beauty of the ſituation with an enthuſiaſtic admiration that evidently beſpoke ſome ſecret ſource of partiality. His looks however were ſufficiently expreſſive; and he preſſed the hand that leaned on his arm with all the fervour of gratitude. Pray, cried he ſmiling, what is become of the pretty little child that uſed to pay you frequent viſits here?

I could not recall the teizing curioſity of Charlotte's behaviour, without laughing heartily from that pleaſed ſenſation with which one recollects paſt vexations, now converted into enjoyment by the preſent happy reverſe; and I related to my Lord, as we walked, the additional anguiſh which the little girl's perſecution had given me during his mother's viſit. Oh! with what gratitude did I raiſe my heart to Heaven for the innumerable bleſſings that ſurrounded me!

As it grew late, Lord Belmont, who dreaded the damps of the evening, perſuaded Lady Aubrey to return with him to the houſe, and Mr. and Mrs. Howard attended them: but my Lord and I prolonged our walk for a full hour longer. Every object around afforded ſome intereſting ſubject for retracing paſt uneaſineſs, and for contemplating with delighted thankfulneſs the preſent happy contraſt. Every interview between us was remembered, every converſation, where prudence on the one ſide and timidity on the

the other ſide preſided, was annalized and inveſtigated, and the ſecret motives of every action acknowledged.

When at length we returned to the houſe, we found cards of congratulation from Lady Mary Lawrence and Lady Elizabeth; and this morning I have received a letter from Lady Linroſe herſelf, who ſends me her felicitations with all the eaſe of a perſon who is unconſcious of ever having intended to injure me. Lord Linroſe coloured with indignation on peruſing it. This is effrontery with a vengeance, ſaid he: but the approach of Lord Belmont ſealed his lips.

I have anſwered her with polite reſerve. She expects, ſhe ſays, to be favoured with a viſit from her ſon and his *amiable bride*, as ſoon as the parade of receiving viſits is at an end; but I fear it will not be in my power to perſuade Lord Linroſe to condeſcend to this, at leaſt for ſome time; and I have told her that as we have eſcaped for the preſent the diſagreeable ceremonials ſhe mentions, by taking up our reſidence with my brother and ſiſter, we muſt devote ſome weeks to theſe duties when Dudley Mount becomes our reſidence, for which reaſon it is not in our power to fix any determined period for waiting upon her Ladyſhip. I have deſired to be particularly remembered to the ſweet Lucy; and indeed I promiſe myſelf much pleaſure in cultivating her friendſhip. Her brother is paſſionately attached to her; and means if poſſible to prevail with her to join our family, as the unaccountable preference given by Lady Linroſe to Miſs Dudley renders home extremely unpleaſant, and his mother, he ſays, he is convinced will have no objection to part with her.

Lord

Lord Belmont, whoſe affection towards my ſiſter and me ſeems hourly to encreaſe, has preſented Fanny with ten thouſand pounds. This comfortable addition to Mr. Howard's fortune gives them every thing they deſire to poſſeſs; for now that Lord Linroſe and I are about to ſettle within four miles of them, Fanny has not a wiſh beyond the limits of the county, and her huſbands taſte leads him wholly to the enjoyment of a country life. His Lordſhip's ſettlements upon his grandſon and me are noble; but as I am very little ſolicitous about theſe matters, I ſhall wave particulars. My Lord, who is fond of rural ſports, intends that we ſhall ſpend a great part of the year at Dudley Mount; a reſolution which gives me infinite pleaſure. He is ſick of the frivolous amuſements of London, and I have no pleaſure in them. I now poſſeſs all my heart can wiſh; and happy in the ſociety of thoſe I ſincerely and fervently love, I wiſh not to enlarge my circle beyond what politeneſs and propriety demand.

Adieu!

H. LINROSE.

P. S. I have this inſtant received your letter. I imagined my happy ſituation would not eaſily admit of augmentation; but the hopes of ſo ſoon embracing and preſenting my beloved Sophia to my dear Lord Linroſe, has overwhelmed me with additional gratitude and delight. Haſten, my Sophia, haſten to your impatient friend.

FINIS.